









CONTINUITY GIRL



Continuity Girl

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A Story of Film Production

MARTHA ROBINSON

GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE
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FOREWORD

THE majority of books I have read dealing with films and film-making have been fantastic and wildly inaccurate. Many writers on films seek to satirise them in extravagant terms to entertain the layman. It is true that the motion picture industry lends itself to exaggeration. It is a world of its own producing another world which of its very nature is somewhat larger than life. Its combination of the artistic and commercial allied to the mechanical and technical makes it seem to the outsider a vast pixilated factory where anything can happen. It appears on the surface to be a strange mad business in which an assortment of curious beings, earning inflated salaries despite their reputed low intelligence, make films in an atmosphere of gold and glitter. A gift to facile authors ! They can hardly wait to dip their pens into bitter ink and poke fun at film producers and film stars.

It is, therefore, a considerable pleasure to me to say that Martha Robinson's book conveys, for almost the first time, an authentic and entertaining glimpse of life as it is lived in a film studio. She was herself one of the best continuity girls I ever worked with. She is an authority on her subject. Her readers will find themselves in the real world of picture-making where a team, the essential ingredient of picture-making, labours through long and difficult hours with a carefully planned schedule of time and expenditure. It allows so little margin of error that if the film is to be an artistic and commercial success, each individual member of the team must be highly trained and efficient at his or her job. One incompetent person can completely throw out of gear the most thoughtfully considered plan with disastrous results. The continuity girl is herself the one member of the team who cannot and must not make a mistake. Directors and stars must accept her

dictates on points of detail and depend utterly upon her. She is the one person in the studio who must always be right and is the one woman who can safely count on having the last word.

But do not let the reader think that the film studio is merely a factory where things purely technical hold sway. As the book clearly shows, film people are individual and even among the celluloid romance may bloom.

Girls seeking careers who may be drawn towards films by *Continuity Girl* should, if they have read the book thoughtfully, have learned something of the hardships and joys of working in pictures as well as the fascination of the business, so it is not necessary for me to accentuate the importance of a practical outlook on such a career. I would warn them that getting into film production is by no means easy. At the moment in Britain film production is not a very large industry, and although the studios are always on the lookout for new blood, the capacity is very small. The number of personnel employed is small. But it is an industry that is expanding rapidly and within the next year or two, as plans mature and new studios open up, I believe the opportunities will increase not two-fold but ten-fold.

FRANK LAUNDER.

Individual Pictures, Ltd.

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I. THE SCRIPT

TEN P.M. An ember fell from the grate with a sigh and the room seemed at once a degree colder. The unshaded electric light glared down upon the five men and one girl seated in a scattered circle.

No one said anything. Jane Weldon ventured to remove her eyes from the shorthand notebook on her knee and loosen her fingers from the pencil. She wondered wearily whether she would ever be able to transcribe the dejected hieroglyphics scrawled over innumerable pages. It was Friday evening. She would have to transcribe all she had taken down on Saturday, for the film went into the studio on Monday morning.

Her tall, slim length bunched on a hard chair, her dark head bent so that a lock of shining, curly hair fell over one side of her face, she gazed under straight brows at the circle of figures slumped in chairs and then, by way of an untidy, paper-strewn floor, at a stained-glass window from which one pane was missing. It was pitch dark outside. She stared at the black square dully. Why had she ever taken the job? The place had first attracted her. It was a lovely old country mansion, somewhat dilapidated, standing incongruously cheek by jowl with a modern studio. And then, secretary to the Production Manager of a film company had seemed an alluring title.

After only two weeks the glamour had worn off. She found she was everybody's secretary. Men whose names she hardly knew wandered in and out, pushing dirty hands through greasy wisps of hair, occasionally stopping behind her chair to mutter hoarsely that they would like her to take this down . . . and before she had time to reach for a pencil, they would reel off a string of words and drift out again, leaving her busily catching up. During this, the Production Manager himself would probably be screaming into the telephone, an exercise at which he excelled, the

performance usually ending in the receiver being dashed down so violently that the services of an electrician were required.

Jane had thought at first that she could not stand the racket, but, after a few days, found herself accepting it as part of the day's work. The wilder and more impassioned the telephone conversations and arguments waxed, the quieter and cooler she became, so that the very contrast made her feel slightly superior—a pleasant sensation for a nineteen-year-old stenographer.

The job had come her way quite by chance. A friend of her father's was a member of a firm of solicitors who were legal advisers to the company. Jane herself had been a typist there for a while, but had found the work so incredibly dull that she had decided to stay at home and help her mother for the time being. It was not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Jackson, her father's friend, had thought of her when he heard the new film company wanted stenographers.

So here she was, yawning her head off behind her hand and wondering how she could have imagined it would be thrilling to take down script alterations. It was dull; the terms employed were unfamiliar; none of the five of them seemed to have an idea between them; she was tired, cold and had had no supper. Anyhow, she need never do it again. The Continuity girl, Irene Marsh, should have been doing it now, but she had been away ill ever since Jane's coming, and was not expected back until Monday. It was her job and she could have it.

"We must have a good line there," said the Managing Director suddenly and firmly.

Jane glanced at him with some distaste. Mr. MacPherson sat in an armchair more or less on his ear, with both legs up on another chair and a dead cigar hanging from one corner of his mouth. He looked like yesterday's pudding.

Next to him sat the Gag Man, astride a hard chair, his arms crossed on its back. He was small and dark, with bright black eyes and an undefeatable optimism. Jane

looked at him, not with hope, for up till now he had not been at all funny, but with a kind of resignation. It was his turn to speak.

Suddenly his eyes lit up and he lifted one hand and slapped it down on the other.

"I've got it!"

He leaned forward and started to speak quickly and persuasively. "... the old street vendor is shouting 'Apples and groipes, apples and groipes'—and the kid comes up and says, 'You've got the apples—but where's the groipes?' ..."

Someone groaned audibly.

"... and the street vendor replies, 'You eat the apples and you'll get the gripes!' ..."

He looked round triumphantly, giggling to himself. There was dead silence. The Managing Director stared thoughtfully at the ceiling and chewed his cigar. The Scenario Writer (who had done most of the dictating) had his jaw pressed on his hand as if suffering from severe toothache. Mr. Stratton, her boss, caressed his aquiline nose with the air of not having heard a word. The fifth individual, a mere nobody who had contributed little to the conference and answered to the name of 'Tommy', continued to pick his teeth, while the head of the earnest young Art Director sank between his shoulders like a tortoise going into its shell.

"Shall I put that down?" asked Jane at last, unable to bear the silence any longer.

Everyone shifted a little.

"It's bound to go down," protested the Gag Man. Was it a pun or not? No one seemed inclined to find out.

"Not in this script," said the Scenario Writer.

The Gag Man looked surprised. "You don't like it?"

No one replied, until the Scenario Writer spoke again.

"I suggest we cut out the street vendor scene," he said.

"Oh, well!" breathed the Gag Man, washing his hands at it.

A sigh of agreement went round the room. Something had been achieved. They had cut out the street vendor scene. Patiently Jane turned back the pages of her notebook, scoring a neat line through them until the beginning of the scene. Then she turned over to a new page and poised her pencil hopefully. Did all Script Conferences behave like this, she wondered? If so, how did scripts get written at all?

"What shall we have instead?" enquired Mr. MacPherson with a show of briskness, examining his dead cigar.

Silence. Jane shivered and straightened her aching back. She was sitting as near to the dying fire as she could get. There was no more coal or wood and it did not seem her place to suggest that someone go in search of supplies. Some dim time ago someone had ordered coffee and sandwiches, but they had not materialised. She wondered how much longer she could sit there without falling asleep. Her mother would be getting anxious, though she had already telephoned to say she would be late. The white paper of her notebook swam and blinked, revolved and stopped, became focused and then diffused. . . .

"What about the toy shop?" came the Art Director's voice.

"Yes, the toy shop?" echoed Mr. Stratton.

"Have we got the exterior of the toy shop?" enquired the fifth man, Tommy, ceasing from tooth picking for a moment.

"No." The abrupt negative from the Art Director defied anyone to ask why not.

Mr. Stratton, however, was not one to miss an argument. "Oh, yes, we have—don't you remember . . .?"

"I remember discussing the exterior of a toy shop," interrupted the Art Director clearly and angrily, "and I distinctly remember that it was canned."

"If you'll excuse me," said Mr. Stratton, very much the Production Manager, "it was not canned. It was merely left in the air."

"And that is exactly where it can stay," replied the Art Director.

It may have been a wave of hysteria—Jane considered she had every right to be hysterical—but she had a vision of a toy shop hanging by a string in mid-air with a large label across it marked 'CANNED'.

Meanwhile the two of them went on arguing to the effect that a toy shop without its exterior was worth nothing to the picture; that they could not 'wipe to' the interior from the previous scene; therefore they had better cut out the toy shop scene as well.

At this moment the door was flung violently open and Gilbert, the steward, entered, clad in a dirty white coat over dirtier trousers, carrying a large tray on which was coffee and sandwiches. He strode across the room, thin-lipped and unsmiling, flung the tray on a table in their midst, then turned and left the room amid their deferential thanks.

Everyone cheered up. It was decided unanimously that it was, after all, possible to 'wipe to' the interior of the toy shop without seeing the exterior and the Scenario Writer proceeded to dictate rapidly. Jane's hand flew across the pages. It almost looked as if another few minutes would see the last of it, when suddenly the silent Tommy came to life and started arguing. The point was obscure to Jane but apparently of vital importance to the script. Both the Scenario Writer and Tommy behaved as if they were sworn enemies and hated each other bitterly. As the dialogue proceeded Jane became so fascinated that she wholly forgot she was tired. It went something like this:

S.W. : Cut to——

TOMMY : You can't cut there.

S.W. : Why not?

TOMMY : You spoil the suspense.

S.W. : I don't agree.

TOMMY : Don't agree on an obvious point like that?

S.W. : I fail to see that it is obvious.

TOMMY : (after pause) Well—what do you propose to cut to ?

S.W. : It might have been better to wait and see in the first place.

TOMMY : Well ?

S.W. : (dictating). Cut to close-up old lady——

TOMMY : (interrupting). Close up !

S.W. : Why not ?

TOMMY : From a long shot ?

S.W. : It was not a long shot.

TOMMY : It was. (Here he appealed to Jane). Would you mind reading out the beginning of the last shot, Miss Weldon ?

Confusedly Jane hunted through the last lines of her shorthand, but before she could find the required passage, they were off again.

S.W. : I know I dictated that it was a long shot, but——

TOMMY : Then why not dictate what you mean ?

S.W. : I never said I didn't mean it to be a long shot.

TOMMY : Am I crazy or are you ? First you say you did not cut from a long shot, then you say it *was* a long shot.

S.W. : You don't understand.

TOMMY : Obviously not.

S.W. : The shot started in long shot, but the old lady moved into medium close shot.

TOMMY : You did not say so in the action.

S.W. : Any fool reading the action can see——

TOMMY : I am not a fool.

S.W. : I never said you were.

At this point Mr. MacPherson unexpectedly told the Scenario Writer to shut up, which surprised Jane. Why didn't he tell the other fellow, who was obviously of little importance, to shut up ?

After a sulky pause the Scenario Writer continued dictating and the toy shop scene was soon dealt with.

"Fade out," he said finally, in the tone of the local vicar giving the benediction.

For a moment no one moved, then there was a general stretching, yawning and sighing. Mr. MacPherson heaved himself out of his chair and threw the chewed stump of his cigar into the grey fireplace. He looked at his watch.

"Eleven o'clock."

The five of them drifted vaguely towards the door. With some amazement Jane noticed that the man called Tommy was offering the Scenario Writer a cigarette and talking to him amiably. Her theory, half formed, that they were deadly enemies in private life, collapsed.

"Can I give you a lift to the station?"

It was her boss, Mr. Stratton, speaking. She smiled. "Thank you. I'll get my things."

When she was seated in the car beside him, he said: "Do you think you can get all that transcribed to-morrow morning?"

"I think so."

"Pity Irene is still away. You haven't met her, have you, Jane?"

Jane started slightly. She had not got used to hearing her first name used by a stranger. In the legal office where she had worked before, everyone was very correctly called by their surnames. Here christian names were in general use.

He was asking her about Irene Marsh. The name had been quoted at her for almost everything that was efficient and charming, so that at first she had been impressed, then rather bored. Who was Irene Marsh anyhow? Only a continuity girl—a humble member of the Production Unit. Her tone was rather cold as she replied that she had not met her.

"You'll like her," said Mr. Stratton with enthusiasm. "He's charming."

"Yes, I've heard so."

"And clever. We couldn't do without her."

Jane thought to herself that they had managed without her quite well this time, but said nothing.

The car swung its headlights round sharply as they drew

into the station yard. Mr. Stratton applied the brakes, and opened the door, leaning across her.

"Sure you're O.K. now?"

"Yes, thank you. Good-night, Mr. Stratton."

She stood watching the car draw away into the darkness, its tail-light winking; then turned and went on to the platform. There were very few people waiting and they all looked cold and miserable. Jane stared bleakly at the palely shining railway lines and thought of her notebook full of shorthand. That Irene Marsh had certainly let her in for it. She felt annoyance rising. The girl was a slacker. She ought to have come back a few days before the production; it wasn't fair. . . .

Mrs. Weldon was sitting up for her when she got home at a quarter to twelve, dressing-gown wrapped round her thin, determined-looking figure, a worried frown on her face, hot cocoa on the cosy stove and Jane's slippers and night clothes warmed ready to get into. Mrs. Weldon was in a mood to disapprove and looked with foreboding on a new job that had started with such late hours. She said so firmly.

Jane, for the hundredth time since she had left childhood behind, made a mental note that Mother was a worrier and things must be kept from her. Now Father was different. You could tell him everything and be certain that his quick wit and sensitivity would reach out beyond the immediate problem and see the good that was to be got out of it. Jane was like him in temperament, an optimist, and shared with him a delightful comradeship, deepened by the fact that he was a cripple from the 1914-1918 war and only just managed to hold down a sub-editorship on the local newspaper by the sheer desire to go on living life to the full.

Therefore Jane drank her cocoa in silence, making light, when she had to reply to questions, of the work she was doing, but looking forward to telling her father every little detail on the first occasion when they would have an hour to themselves.

When she quietly entered the bedroom she shared with her younger sister, Mary, it appeared that Mary was asleep, her head under the bedclothes. But as soon as the door had closed on Mrs. Weldon, the bedclothes shot back and Mary sat up, her bright hair tumbling over her flushed face, her blue eyes snapping.

"What's the low down?" she hissed.

Mary was thirteen, film-struck, stage-struck and irresponsible, her mother's open despair but secret pride.

Jane sat on her bed yawning. "I've been helping the Continuity girl."

"What on earth is that?"

Jane relaxed and smiled. "Darned if I know."

Half an hour later when Mary's endless questions had been stemmed, Jane drifted off into sleep. The last thing she heard was Mary, suddenly seeming to come to life again, saying contemptuously: "Apples and groipes! Why, I could have thought of a better joke than that!"

Jane slept.

About noon the next morning she sat at the typewriter, holding all down her back. Bang, bang, bang . . . how slowly the pages of her notebook turned over. Clatter, clack, clack . . . how stiff she was. Bang, bang, bang, not daring to stop for fear she would not find the energy to go on. So focused on the typewriter was her brain that she had the illusion of being one with it, so that it was impossible to stop, for the controlling force seemed to be the machine itself, not her.

But at last it was finished. She rose stiffly and gathered the papers together. On her knees on the floor she sorted out the carbon copies into piles. One copy had to be taken to the typists' room for duplicating. She heard someone come in at the door but did not look up. Then a light step hurried forward.

"Oh, you poor thing—let me help."

Jane looked up dully. The voice was a girl's, but it

belonged to no one she had seen before. She was about twenty-five, small, with thick, neatly-waved fair hair, a broad forehead and a pale, pointed face. She must be Irene Marsh and she was indeed charming. Jane's feelings of hostility against the imaginary Irene melted before the reality.

Before she could make any remark the other was on her knees, gathering up the roughly sorted papers and putting them in order.

"You're Jane Weldon," she said, "and I'm Irene."

Jane sat back on her heels, pushing her hair behind her ears and smiled. "That's right. And I've been cursing you."

Irene coloured slightly. "I'm sure you have. They ought to have sent for me."

Jane could have bitten out her tongue. Here was no slacker. The girl looked white enough to be in bed now.

"Rot. I was only joking. You don't look fit to be up."

Mr. Stratton came rushing in, his arms full of drawings, the Art Director trailing in his wake. They were arguing, as usual. He nearly fell over the two girls; exclaimed; saw Irene, and his face brightened.

"Oh, Irene! You've met Jane. Good. How are you? Better?"

Irene rose to her feet. "Yes, thank you, Mr. Stratton."

He stared at her with his bright, birdlike eyes. "You don't look up to much."

Irene put up her chin. "I'm quite all right."

"Bronchitis, wasn't it?" He did not seem to see her nod, but glanced sideways at Jane. He turned away muttering to himself: "This is a big production." Suddenly he wheeled round on Jane. "How would you like to go into the studio as Irene's assistant?"

Jane gasped, found that her mouth was open and closed it. She was aware of the light that leapt to Irene's eyes, but tried not to let it mean anything to her. She was dead tired and impervious to further demands on her.

Mr. Stratton went on enthusiastically : " It's a chance to learn Continuity from one of the best Continuity girls in England." His eyes hooded themselves, like an eagle's, and his voice took on a persuasive, crooning note that Jane knew well. She felt sure he must be Welsh, from the lilt. " It's a career with endless opportunities if you are ambitious, which I'm sure you are, Jane. And you've got the right personality, hasn't she, Irene ? "

Irene, looking rather awkward, smiled. " Yes, Mr. Stratton."

Jane was shaken, but definitely against the idea. Couldn't they understand that she was tired ?

Suddenly Irene said in a small, matter-of-fact voice, " I'd like to have you with me, Jane."

Jane's defences went down. Irene needed her. With a curious feeling of taking a step into the void, she said : " All right, Irene. I'll do it if you think I can help."

" Help ! " Irene's hand grasped her's. The fingers were firm, resolute and warm.

She heard Mr. Stratton say, " Good." And was aware that he immediately strode to his table, flung down the drawings and started arguing furiously with the Art Director.

Then she found her arms full of sorted scripts and Irene walking by her side down the hall to the typists' room. Only then did she fully realise what she had done. She was no longer a stenographer but an assistant Continuity girl.

She had started a new career.

II. THE STUDIO

MONDAY morning, 9 a.m. Never as long as she lived, thought Jane, would she forget her first few hours in the studio. To her the scene was one of indescribable confusion. She stood as close to Irene Marsh's desk as she could get, hoping she did not look as much like a new girl at the beginning of term as she felt.

The 'set' was a huge hotel foyer. Armies of men were busy doing a number of various jobs and shouting at each other incessantly. The only one she knew by sight was the Art Director. Now, with an army of assistants, he appeared to be arranging furniture, touching up decorations and trying out effects. He was somewhat impeded by another group of young men—almost boys they seemed—who were engaged in laying pieces of rail on the floor. Jane could not think why. No sooner had they put down a piece of rail than the Art Director wished to change the carpet under it. No sooner had the Art Director placed a table to his artistic satisfaction, (this entailed a rapid retreat to a point of vantage and a long look through his two hands, arranged to form a square) than the other group demanded its removal elsewhere.

The two staffs shouted and raved at each other. When Jane caught Irene's attention she found that the latter group were the camera crew and that they were laying a track for the camera to move over, as the first shot was to be a tracking or moving shot.

Jane continued to watch, fascinated. The chaos seemed to be increasing. Other men in dirty overalls were laying cables and fixing tall lamps on wheels; they got in the way of the camera track. Some were placing smaller lamps on a rail above the set (the 'spot' rail, Jane learnt) and in so doing were shaking the walls of the set. Gilt and white plaster kept falling down and the Art Director was almost in tears. His emotion did not move the electricians who

simply stared through him when he complained. Obviously they did not hold with Art.

At this juncture another young man, more earnest and harassed-looking than any Jane had so far noticed, and seeming to have some authority, arrived on the scene and sent everyone about their business, standing up for one and reprimanding another. In short, he was effective.

Jane asked Irene if he was the Director.

"Who? That one? No, he's Jim, the First Assistant Director. Mr. Barnes, the Director, won't come on the set just yet."

"The First Assistant? How many are there?"

"Three or four, depending on the production."

"Oh. Isn't there anything I can do, Irene?"

Irene looked round worriedly. "In a few minutes—when all the crowd have arrived."

Jane felt relieved. She hated standing about like this. It made her feel conspicuous.

As she stood there she smiled to herself, remembering the family's reaction to her news when she had got home on Saturday, very late for dinner. Her mother had been openly hostile.

"Working among all those men," she had said, "and all hours of the night, I suppose."

"Oh, no," Jane had hastened to assure her. "Production hours come under the Trade Union regulations—not a minute later than 7.45 p.m., unless something quite exceptional calls for an extension."

"And what about last night, up till half-past eleven?" her mother had demanded triumphantly.

"Oh, script is different. That only happens once in a while before production."

"Besides, what about it?" her father had clipped in, popping up from behind his newspaper.

"Bad for the child's health," retorted his wife.

"Work never killed anyone," he had retaliated. "At least, if you like the work."

"We'll see," had been Mrs. Weldon's final word, given with a secret air, as if she knew more than any of them.

Alone with Mary that night Jane had savoured the full flavour of living a unique moment in her life. Mary, who had already had numerous ambitions, the most recent having been to be representative for England at the Olympic Games as a runner, immediately decided that she would rather be a Continuity girl; finally, of course, she would be a Director and Jane, as she had no particular ambition, could be her Assistant.

"'Xcuse me, Miss."

An electrician stood just behind her with a lamp on wheels. She realised he wished to place it where she stood and moved hastily back. She tripped and only just saved herself from a fall. Blushing, she stepped carefully over the cable and moved away. A positive barrage of lamps had now been moved up so that no one could conveniently walk on and off the set. Everyone tripped continually and this added to the shouting and confusion. The camera had been set up on the track and Irene was talking to a youth seated on a swivel stool attached to the truck. He was dark and taciturn-looking. "Rather bad-tempered I should think," decided Jane.

Just in front of the camera stood a tall, immaculate man in a spotless white shirt and an eyeshade. He was listening to a short, tousled individual who, almost on tiptoe, seemed to whisper in his ear. Both of them pointed upwards at intervals and made strange signs. Jane noted that the electricians stationed aloft were watching them and changed and moved lamps without appearing to have any difficulty in understanding the signs made to them. They seemed oblivious of the wild disorder below and stood, detached and cool like gods, on their frail perches. When Jane looked again for the tall man, he had gone.

Some of the crowd were drifting on to the set—the 'Extras', as they were called. Jane stared at them with frank curiosity. She had seen them about before, coming

and going from the studio, but never dressed and made-up. They did not eat in the same café as the staff. The flat yellow grease paint gave them a curiously vacant expression. They stood about patiently in groups, like cattle. For a while they were allowed to watch, then the First Assistant knocked into one of them and, seeming to become aware of them for the first time, bawled to them to stand back. Obediently they drifted into the shadows beyond the reflection of the brilliantly lit set. Jane had a feeling that they could not be human beings, but were ghosts, conjured up for a day to make sham laughter in a sham world. She heard her name being called by Irene and went to her quickly.

"Want a job, Jane?"

"Rather."

"Do you think you could take some notes of the dresses the crowd are wearing, together with their names? It is to make sure they turn up in the same things during the days we are using them."

Jane was relieved. This was easy. "Oh, yes, I'm sure I can do that."

She went to the desk, found her notebook and pencil and crossed the floor towards the crowd, feeling very important. She was aware that several of the Unit turned their heads to watch her. She hoped her grey flannel skirt and the grey pullover she had knitted herself looked as smart and businesslike as they had seemed when she put them on that morning. She had purposely swept her dark hair behind her ears and off her rather high forehead and wore flat-heeled shoes on Irene's advice. She was glad to feel a little less tall than usual, for when you are long-legged and impatient and apt to rush about, not looking where you are going—

Her toe struck something and there was a loud crack and a fierce spark. Jane leapt into the air with fright and then blushed deeply at the rude laughter of the nearby camera crew. She fled into the kindly shadows behind the

lights. There she recovered her poise and turned her mind to her job. She could do that efficiently, at any rate.

Two hours later when she had finished chasing elusive strangers through the studio, into the dressing-rooms, round the café and even into the cloakrooms, Jane was not so sure the job was easy, but pretty certain she had all the necessary information. She typed out the list and presented it to Irene, feeling pleased with herself.

Irene glanced at it, frowned, looked up and studied some of the crowd standing near, then sighed.

"I'm sorry, Jane, I forgot to tell you that the most important item from the camera point of view is the jewellery. You see, anything that catches the light—"

Jane's heart fell. "Oh, of course! I never thought—"

She took the list and humbly went back and pestered them all again. They were very patient but must, she felt, have been very bored with her.

By this time the chaos had considerably subsided. The tall man, who turned out to be the Chief Cameraman, was lighting the leading artistes.

Irene paused by Jane's side and pointed. "There's Mr. Barnes, the Director."

Jane stared, started, and stared again. "What, that bald man who looks like the plumber?"

Irene grinned. "Yes. Disappointed?"

"But he was at the Script Conference and I thought he was nobody at all."

It was not for some time that Jane understood just why Irene laughed so delightedly. It is a well-known grievance with Directors that they are considered to be nobody until they get into the studio—unless they write their own scripts.

A little later Jane found Irene typing out long lists from her notebook. She asked what they were.

"Notes on the first set-up."

Jane felt she ought to know, but didn't, so at last she said: "What is a set-up?"

Irene stopped typing and leaned back in her chair and smiled, passing her small, dimpled hand over her fair hair in a characteristic gesture. "You poor thing. I just talk at you, forgetting you don't even know the jargon. A set-up is as much of the scene as will be visible through the camera during the shot. Go and look through the camera now."

Thus encouraged, but feeling very shy, Jane approached the camera. No one took any notice of her. She mounted the truck as she had seen Irene do earlier. But, though she applied her eye to the right place, there was nothing to be seen. She withdrew, puzzled. The operator, the bad-tempered looking fellow, was looking at her. His face had the appearance of the blank in dominocs.

"I can't see anything," said Jane.

"You're not supposed to."

"But I want to."

"Well, now!" He masticated his chewing gum thoughtfully.

Jane felt a wave of indignation pouring over her. She put her chin in the air. "Irene does."

"Irene asks my permission."

"Oh." She swallowed her rage. "Please may I look through?"

He shook his head sombrely. "No. You're too young."

Bewildered and annoyed, Jane retired and told Irene, who said, "Oh dear, they're always the same with anyone new."

She went across and spoke to the operator herself, then beckoned Jane. This time Jane could see. She was informed that when she had looked previously, the camera had not been 'swung over,' but this did not convey much to her. She peered through again, to be impressive, then got off the truck to find the youngest individual on the set, a mere boy of about fifteen, had joined the operator, whose name was George. They were both staring at her solemnly.

"Wonder what she does with what she sees?" enquired the boy innocently.

"Can't think," was the reply. "It'll all be different when we shoot, anyway."

Nonplussed for the second time, Jane retired and, finding Irene sitting at her desk with apparently nothing much to do, sat on the edge of it.

"Irene," she began, "why are the camera crew so obstructive?"

Irene smiled. "They're not really. You'll find them very helpful later—if you treat them the right way."

Jane felt doubtful. Really, that tall, dark one—

"The one you call George seems rather bad-tempered to me," she observed.

Irene laughed. She had the most delightful chuckle in her throat. "Oh, George! He doesn't approve of women and thinks Continuity should be done by men."

"Really?" Jane looked at George with renewed interest. So he was a woman-hater. He seemed to feel her eyes on him for he glanced over to her. Almost unconsciously she drew herself up to her full height and gave him a stare that she hoped was as good a 'dead pan' as he had given her. Then she looked away. "That'll teach him," she thought to herself.

"The other," said Irene, "is the Clapper boy and is generally known as The Boy."

"He's rude," said Jane.

Irene laughed again. "He's a dear, really." She looked towards the set and suddenly got to her feet, gathering up her script. "I do believe something is about to happen."

She was right. The First Assistant bawled out a second later, "Rehearsal please! Everyone off the set!"

There was a general stampede for a few moments and then comparative quiet. Jane followed Irene to a position near the camera under the lamps. She noticed her feel for something hung round her neck.

"What's that?" she whispered.

"Stop watch to time the action."

The Director sat directly under the camera on a stool similar to the one the operator was using, attached to the truck. The artistes stood ready. At a sign from the Director they started their scene, talking and walking slowly forward. The camera truck had begun to move back when suddenly someone Jane had not noticed before burst out of a small cabin some way behind the lights and came up to the Director.

"Who's that?" asked Jane.

"The Chief Engineer—Angus. A Scot. There's the mike." She pointed up to a little metal disc hanging over the camera.

The consultation over they started again. Then George was not satisfied and he and the Chief Cameraman and the Director went into a huddle. The artistes were asked to walk more slowly to give the camera time to track back. They tried again. And again. After the sixth rehearsal the leading actor became tongue-tied over a particularly difficult sentence. He had to say, "There is a subtle something about the fragrance of an iris . . .", and he could not avoid lisping on the word 'fragrance'. At first it was a joke. Everyone laughed. But he went on lisping. He drank water and tried coughing. He ceased lisping but began to muddle up his words. Jane felt very sorry for him.

Mr. Barnes then discovered it was a quarter to one and relievedly gave the word to break for lunch.

Jane was astonished that so much time had gone by and so little been done, but Irene did not appear to find it surprising.

As she followed Irene into the café with the rest of the Unit, Jane felt important. Often, during the fortnight she had been a mere stenographer, she had looked with interest and envy on the specially reserved table for members of the production. Now she was one of them.

When they had started on their dinner Irene asked her how she liked being in the studio.

Jane thought about it, then said, "It's beginning to dawn on me that Continuity is rather an important job."

Irene smiled. "Up to a point. But don't run away with the idea that the rest of the Unit couldn't do without you. They could, but it would cost them more money and more headaches."

"Is that a warning not to get uppish?"

"Perhaps. They don't like it."

Jane was grinning back at her appreciatively. "I'll remember."

Soon they were back in the studio. The noise started again, more deafening than before. Food seemed to have increased everyone's energy to bursting point. Actually the whole Unit was straining to get the first shot 'in the can'. The noise went on mounting. Behind the set carpenters hammered wildly at supports. A huge electric fan whirled high in the roof. The First and Second Assistants were bawling themselves hoarse arranging the crowd, who eddied hither and thither like sheep. Jane thought they would never settle down to work.

Suddenly, shatteringly, the First Assistant, in a voice that suggested it was his last effort in life, bawled, "Qui-et, please!"

A wave of silence passed over the studio. The carpenters' hammers ceased; shuffling feet were stilled; voices dropped and whispers died away; the fan sighed and stopped. One might have heard the proverbial pin drop.

Jane wondered uneasily if anyone could hear the thundering of her heart.

"Camera," said the Director.

Jane looked at the camera and detected a faint purring sound. George had his eye glued to the view finder. Jane was impressed by the tense stillness of his whole figure. One of the assistants sat on a side seat of the truck, fingers poised over a knob she knew later to be the focus finder. The



George was not satisfied

(facing p. 20)



other camera crew stood by ready to pull back at a given signal. Nothing happened for a moment, then a bell buzzed.

"Scene 1, take 1" said a bored voice.

The Clapper boy was standing nonchalantly in front of the camera with a board which he held up in front of him. On the board was chalked the numbers he had just repeated. He brought down a wooden bar attached to the frame of the board with a bang and then moved swiftly to the side of the set.

"Action," said the Director.

The dialogue started. The camera crept silently back. The crowd passed and repassed in the background. Only a few lines were spoken and then—

"Cut," said the Director.

A return wave of sound swept over the studio. Voices were raised and doors banged. The carpenters' tools started off again; the fan whirled. Over the increasing cacophony Jane heard the First Assistant ask if it was O.K. She could not imagine for the life of her to whom he was speaking, for he stood alone in a pensive attitude, looking at the floor. Suddenly a voice boomed: "O.K. for sound!" It was a loud speaker. Jane realised that the First Assistant had been standing under the microphone, and speaking to the Sound Engineer in his box.

She came out of a kind of daze and looked over Irene's shoulder. Irene's pencil was flying as she made notes. The Director called to her: "Playing time, Irene?"

Irene consulted her stop watch as she moved over to Mr. Barnes. "One minute, ten seconds—take off thirty seconds for the run up and down—say forty seconds, Mr. Barnes."

"Thanks. Dialogue O.K.?"

"Yes, Mr. Barnes."

Jane listened anxiously. It appeared that Irene had checked the dialogue, used her stop watch and made copious notes on the action.

George, the operator, had been talking to the Chief

Cameraman and they now both approached Mr. Barnes. Irene laid down her notes and joined the group. Jane tried to decipher the shorthand. The words 'right' and 'left' were used more than once. Irene returned.

"We're going to take again. N.G. for camera—track too bumpy."

They took it again. The second time Mr. Barnes disapproved of the action. Then it was N.G. for sound because the artistes came too near the microphone; then the leading actor started to 'fluff' his lines again. Everyone shuffled uncomfortably, remembering the rehearsals. Jane felt quite nervous.

Mr. Barnes had the brilliant idea of writing the sentence up on a blackboard in large letters, so that it could be read off. But it was no good. Faces grew anxious.

Jane suddenly remembered that her sister, Mary, used to lisp and had been cured at school by being taught to breathe before the word causing the trouble. She whispered this to Irene, who looked interested and finally went over and repeated the information to Mr. Barnes. He appeared impressed. He went and spoke quietly to the actor, who looked relieved. He then returned to his stool. Everyone brightened. Jim bawled "Qui-et, please!" for the ninth time. Silence fell.

"Camera."

The camera purred. The buzzer went. The Clapper boy did his stuff.

"Action."

The scene proceeded. The camera tracked back smoothly; the mike followed. The actor paused after the word 'subtle' as if searching for the right expression, and the entire Unit held their breaths. He continued, "—something about the fragrance of an iris—"

There might have been heard a faint sigh all round the studio.

"Cut," said Mr. Barnes quietly, and jumped up. "Good. How's that for camera?"

George nodded and held up his thumbs. All looked towards the mike.

"Hold it, please," said a gentle voice.

He was middle-height and fair. He was setting up a small camera on a tripod in front of the big truck, working quickly and with precision. About thirty, Jane thought, and giving an impression of reserve and detachment. Then he smiled and she caught her breath. Such a fund of humour twinkled in those deep-set eyes—surely they were grey? Who could he be?

She looked to Irene for enlightenment and found she was seated at her desk, but looking towards the stranger with a little smile on her lips as if she, too, found him charming. Jane moved to her quickly.

"Who is he, Irene?"

Irene seemed to start. "Oh, the Stills Photographer, John Lang. Haven't you met him?"

"Gosh, isn't he good-looking!"

"Think so?" Irene's voice was amused. "I'll introduce you in a minute."

Suddenly the loud speaker said, "O.K. for sound."

A wave of noise rose, under which Jane just caught Mr. Barnes saying, "Next shot, close-up Miss Lynn—here."

Irene was typing away for dear life. Mr. Barnes paused by her desk. "Time, Irene?"

"Same as Take 1, Mr. Barnes—forty seconds."

"Good. Print that last one. Reserve, take 1."

"Yes, Mr. Barnes." Irene made a note. And went on typing. Jane drew close and read over her shoulder. Scene 1 (Script shot 110) Take 9. Playing time 40 seconds. Footage——"

She ceased typing and looked over towards the camera and raised her voice, calling, "Footage please, George."

He heard her. "Oh, sorry—one hundred and forty feet."

He continued typing. Someone paused by the desk.

"Hello, busy as usual?"

It was John Lang. His tripod folded, he stood looking down at Irene.

"Yes, John. This is Jane, my new assistant—John Lang."

Jane held out her hand and he took it briefly, giving her a quick, quizzical glance.

"Photogenic," he said decidedly. "Don't you think so, Irene?"

"Now, John," admonished Irene, "you'll be putting ideas into Jane's head. She's going to be a most useful assistant and a first-rate Continuity girl. Don't go making her into a star, please."

He laughed. "All right. I won't." He turned to Jane. "Do you want to be a film star? Don't say 'yes'."

"I've never thought about it," confessed Jane, flattered and a little confused.

"Then don't start," he advised. "So long, Irene." He turned and walked off, swingingly. Again Jane had that impression of detachment, of reserve. It was most attractive.

Irene was typing again and Jane, after a few moments, continued to read over her shoulder: "Footage 140 feet. Long Shot of foyer. Crowd in background passing to and fro from reception desk L. Girl behind desk. Robert and Jessica enter picture R. and approach camera. Robert carrying suitcase right hand, Jessica carrying handbag under left arm. As they enter M.S. camera tracks back and holds them."

"What is M.S.?" asked Jane. But she was still thinking of John Lang.

"Medium shot."

Irene went on typing. When she had finished she took the page out of the machine and handed it to Jane.

"That's a detailed account of the whole scene as played in the chosen take," she explained.

Jane saw that before the scene were noted the other 'takes', the reasons for their being no good, their footages

and even the lens used for the shot. Her eyes grew round. Never, never would she be capable of getting all that detail down in the short time it took to play a scene. She felt sure she would never even notice it, let alone remember it. She told Irene as much.

Irene smiled, her tolerant, cheerful little smile. "It'll come to you suddenly," she assured Jane.

Several close shots were taken with comparative ease and celerity. Jane began to feel the heat of the glaring overhead lamps on her head. It ached. Her feet ached from the unaccustomed standing. She kept thinking of John Lang and what he had said about her. Perhaps he would take her photograph? She felt elated, though tired.

The next day things began to seem a little less muddled. She asked Irene if she might attempt to transcribe her notes and type them out for her in the correct form. Irene was delighted as this would free her for other jobs. At first Jane found it difficult to read Irene's shorthand, but she soon got used to her particular idiosyncrasies. Then she plucked up sufficient courage to ask the Camera crew for the footages. The Boy gave them to her with an air of extreme gravity, as if he was imparting secret information. George never deigned to speak to her himself, but kept his face averted and went on chewing. Jane decided he was awful.

As she typed she struggled to understand the terms 'right' and 'left' as used in the notes. Action was described from the point of view of the audience, and when an actor went out left of picture, the hand he raised to put on his hat was certainly on the left of the picture, but it was his right hand. Never having been very strong on her left and right, Jane was for a while confused, but with concentration she got it straight in her mind.

As the day wore on she was particularly impressed by the way Mr. Barnes, the Director, took Irene's word as law. He would shout for her every few minutes and ask a question

about dress, dialogue, time, footage or position of 'props' (which meant all furniture and effects on the set) and she would reply without hesitation. He never questioned her reply. But Irene, Jane noticed, always went straight back to her desk and turned up her notes.

"Why do you do that?" asked Jane, puzzled.

"To see if I was right."

This seemed to Jane to be the wrong way round. "Surely you should look up your notes first?"

Irene shook her head. "You see, Jane, it is so important to train your memory in this game, and you are so often asked to give immediate answers which leave no time for checking up, that you must be able to rely on giving a correct answer."

"But if, on consulting your notes, you find you are wrong——?"

Irene smiled. "The Continuity girl must never be wrong."

"But if you find you are?" insisted Jane.

"You tell the Director, of course. But that must not happen often, or his confidence in you will be shaken, and then you're no good to him."

Jane was still puzzled. "Then I can't see why you don't always check up first."

"My dear child, if you don't use your legs, you lose the use of them. The only way to train your memory to be reliable is to use it."

Jane considered the point. "I think I see," she said at last, somewhat dismally. "But I shall never be able to rely on mine."

"Nonsense," replied Irene mildly.

But Jane was not cheered. Her head and eyes still ached, although Irene had kindly lent her an eyeshade. It all seemed frankly impossible.

The hours flew by, nevertheless; no sooner had she finished one job than there was another to do. In the middle of typing out a shot for Irene she heard Jim shout

"That's all for to-day!" and looked up in genuine surprise.

There was a mad rush and eddy in all directions as the Unit hurried to pack up. Jane relaxed, aware of headache and weariness, yet there was a kind of satisfaction, too. She had really helped to-day.

She sat watching the others and could not help noticing the exhilaration that swept through the studio. Some laughed; others whistled; faces were smoothed out, alight; there was a pervading sense of good fellowship. She thought to herself that the extreme tension under which they worked, the enforced silences and ensuing fury of shouting and rushing, the atmosphere of nervousness sometimes created by the artistes, the intense heat and glare, must induce such a pitch of excitement that the shock of relaxation was unusually extreme.

However, though some of the Unit seemed able to stroll out of the studio at once, it was not so for Irene. Jane had not stayed on the previous evening as Irene had said she looked exhausted and sent her packing. Now, her papers gathered together and the typewriter covered, Irene still had work to do.

"I've got to check the camera and sound sheets," she said, "but don't you come if you're tired."

She rose to her feet. "I'll come."

They walked side by side across the almost empty floor, strewn with cables, furniture, chairs, bits and pieces and so on. Jane was suddenly aware of the tremendous height of the place and of the curious muted tone of their voices in the huge space, with its padded, sound-proofed walls.

The camera and sound staffs had unloaded the film and were packing it up. Both staffs were rather curt over the loading and Jane registered for future use that it was necessary to keep an even temper at the end of a day's work, however tired you might be. She admired Irene's unruffled calm and wondered if she, being of an impatient nature, could ever achieve it.

As they left the studio Jane asked exactly what Irene had checked on the two sheets.

"The footage for each take. And, of course, that the right take is marked off for printing. It would never do if sound and camera were to order a print of a different take. They wouldn't synchronise."

Jane smiled. "Yes. Even I can see that."

Irene tucked her manuscripts more firmly under her arm. "Well, now for the 'rushes'."

"What are they?"

"Of course, you wouldn't know. It's the worst ordeal of the day for Continuity."

Jane groaned. "What, another?"

"Yes. It's yesterday's work seen on the screen, my dear. And woe betide the Continuity girl if there is any bad matching."

Jane was awed. They had a long, cool drink at the café bar and then drifted into the projection theatre and sat down together near the back.

"Irene!" called a voice from the front. It was the Director.

"No luck," whispered Irene, then aloud: "Here, Mr. Barnes."

"Come and sit behind me. I may want to make some notes."

Irene moved resignedly and Jane followed. The projector sent a beam on to the screen and the slightly adenoidal face of The Boy appeared with his clapper board. Various unkind remarks were heard in the dimness. Then the action started.

Jane was enthralled. This was her first experience of seeing a film in the making. It was like having a few pieces of a large jig-saw puzzle and trying to think what the whole picture would be like. Irene watched tensely. When all the scenes had been run through there was a pause and the lights went up. Irene relaxed.

"Was it all right?" whispered Jane.

Irene nodded. She was making some notes.

Mr. Barnes was looking towards the Cameraman, who seemed thoughtful. "All right, Straker?"

"Um. I could have done better with that first tracking shot. The close-ups are all right."

"Lovely one of Jessica."

"Think so?" He sounded pleased.

Mr. Barnes turned towards the Sound Engineer. "Satisfied, Angus?"

He looked far from satisfied. He was, Jane remembered, a Scot. "Bad set for sound," he remarked, but that was all.

Jane caught the Art Director frowning.

"Well, we'll just run through them again." Mr. Barnes raised his voice. "Again, please, Tom."

The whole lot were put on the screen again.

"Why," whispered Jane to Irene, "does the Director always allow a pause at the beginning and end of the scenes when the actors are doing nothing?"

"Must have something to cut on," said Irene.

"Cut on?"

"Yes. The film is cut and joined together to make a continuous reel, you know. You'll see how it's done when you come into the Cutting Rooms."

"Oh. Is that why the last line of the big scene was repeated in the close-up?"

"Getting observant, aren't you?" enquired Irene, with approval.

As they crowded out of the projection theatre, Jane ran straight into her late boss, Mr. Stratton.

"Hello," he said brightly; "enjoying Continuity?"

"Oh, yes!" said Jane, feeling she must also be bright. She turned to find Irene smiling at her.

"Are you eight-thirty at the studio to-morrow?"

"If I can wake up," replied Jane, grinning. "My feet and my eyes feel as if they'd been peppered."

"You'll get used to it," Irene's small, pointed face under

its thatch of fair hair looked pale, but she was as cheerful and unconcerned as ever. " 'Night."

" Good-night, Irene."

Jane looked after her as she walked away, scripts tucked under her arm, neat, trim, capable and charming. She felt extraordinarily glad that she had been able to help, even so little, and quite certain that she would herself never make a Continuity girl.

III. JANE SAVES A RETAKE

THREE weeks later Jane sat precariously on the 'spot rail', script and notebook on knee, pencil clutched in her hand. Though actually only about thirty feet up, she seemed to be nearer a hundred, for there was nothing to hold on to and every time an electrician moved to attend to a lamp, the whole narrow gangway swung and creaked.

Down below two hundred negroes looked ready for anything. They had been rehearsed to a pitch of excitement to sing a chorus to a playback (a record relayed through a loud speaker). They had been instructed to let themselves go and looked as if they were eager to do so. One of their number had been a saxophone player and understood rhythm. He was to beat time in the middle of the crowd while dancing. Several cut-ins of close-ups were wanted and Jane had volunteered to go aloft and make notes of the special groups at the points marked in the song where these close-ups were required. She had hoped to get away from the heat and the smell. Now she felt it must be true that bad air rises, for the stench was even worse aloft. What with that and the heat from the arc lamps and the insecurity of her perch, she felt far from comfortable. Her head began to swim and she hoped devoutly she would not fall headlong into the middle of the scene. Even a nightmare (the scene depicted the dream of the leading comedian) would hardly account for her sudden appearance.

A passing thought made her smile. What would her mother say if she could see her now? Her father, she knew, would be tickled to death; as for Mary, she would be thrilled. Every night since she had been on production, Jane had endured detailed questioning on the day's doings and, because she had suddenly become somewhat of a heroine in her sister's eyes, had endured it good-naturedly. It was nice to be important to someone, even to one's own younger sister.

She craned forward, trying to see what the hold-up was. There was a restless air of expectancy in the crowd and among the Unit, but so far aloft Jane could not determine exactly what was happening.

Then there was a sudden rush from the sound box and the Chief Engineer himself, looking, even from above, dishevelled and annoyed, went up to the Director and started to argue about something, waving his large hands and seeming more like a large bear than usual. Jane grinned to herself. Angus had always a growl, but it seldom amounted to anything. Only yesterday he had begged Mr. Barnes to have the artistes 'keep it level' in a highly emotional scene.

"But," Mr. Barnes had protested with due indignation, "I don't want them to keep it level. The girl whispers because she's frightened and then, when she sees the door slowly open, she naturally screams."

"But need she scream so loudly?"

"If she doesn't she won't sound frightened."

"My dear man, it's breaking the microphone."

"Then lift the thing up."

"Then we can't hear the wheesper." (Angus always got more Scotch during an argument.)

"Can't you lift it up after she's whispered?"

Heavy scowl. This was too much like common-sense to please any Sound Engineer.

"Oh, yes, we *can*—but why can't we be told these things during the rehearsal? I never knew the girl had to scream. I'm never told anything."

"It's in the script."

"What is?"

"The scream."

Heavier scowl. "My good mon—if I believed all that was in the script! . . ."

Here they had glared at each other. Finally—

"Well," said Mr. Barnes, "can it be done, or can't it?"

"Oh, yes. Now I know."

The scene had been perfectly recorded. Unfortunately the Camcraman had then discovered that the shadow he had been trying to eliminate, without success, was the microphone. There had been another long argument, after which the camera, the microphone and the artiste had been all moved, so that no one should feel aggrieved.

Jane had come to the conclusion that the last person to be considered in this perpetual warfare was the artiste.

Now the present difficulty was settled and Jane saw Angus retreat to his sound box. The two cameras were ready. Dick, the Assistant Property man, was holding the clapper board ready. The Boy, who usually did the clapper board, was wanted on the second camera and on such occasions the foot-nothing Dick was used. Acting as Clapper boy for two cameras is not so simple. The board, after the buzz, has to be faced to each camera and then held mid-way while the clapper is clapped, so that both cameras can see it.

Dick, looking about as much like a startled rabbit as it was possible for a human being to look (thought Jane), stood dithering in the middle of the huge set, almost wiped out by the blinding lights. She felt a maternal pang of pity, but Dick tirelessly pushed a chair round the set after her (since she had once said her feet ached) and as tirelessly begged her to sit down. He had a walrus moustache of prodigious size and large, watery blue eyes which gave him a peculiarly weebegone expression. He had a wife and six children and had adopted his sister's orphaned family into the bargain. He suffered from boils and Jane had given him much good advice, passed on from her mother, which he never took. She decided that he really liked being miserable.

The cameras were turning over. Without waiting for the buzz Dick wildly flapped the board at the two cameras. The buzz went. He realised something was wrong. Jim shouted to him to 'do it again', but he was petrified. Mr. Barnes yelled at him.

Dick, nervously fluttering the board at one camera and forgetting the second altogether, stuttered out the number and clapped. As he gathered himself together to bolt thankfully away, the second camera operator shrieked out that he had not seen the board. Dick was ready to collapse. Jane nearly fell off the gangway in her cagerness to be of assistance and with relief saw Jim rush forward, seize the board, show it to both cameras, clap it again and take the petrified Dick by the shoulders and rush him out of the picture.

Everyone sighed thankfully. Jane settled back and held her pencil poised, her eyes anxiously roving the crowd of negroes.

The comedian and the hero played their parts. The playback started up and the comedian sang the verse of the song. The chorus was reached. The natives put in their lines quite satisfactorily. The comedian sang the second verse. The natives began to stamp and sway, their eyeballs glistening, their muscles jerking rhythmically, their spears tapping the ground. The second chorus started. They began to let themselves go. The louder the playback played, the louder they screeched and yelled. The whites of their eyes and the flash of their teeth as they sang and grinned became more and more apparent. The huge drummer crouched over his drum (Jane made a note of his action over that particular line of the song). The banging of shields and spears made an accompaniment like giant cymbals. Black bodies twitched, circled and jerked. The playback did its loudest and best, but the negroes beat it. It could no longer be heard. It finished. They were half a chorus ahead. They neither knew nor cared. They were no longer acting but enjoying themselves.

Jane, aloft, realised that the cameras had ceased turning and various members of the Unit were shouting to the negroes to stop, but it was no good. They went on to another chorus. Everyone shouted. Jane, hardly realising what she was doing, shouted too. It was no use.

In all the appalling din, Jane decided she must get down. She felt quite faint. Somehow she reached the bottom of the ladder, just as the negroes gradually realised they were no longer needed to sing. As she touched the floor a small figure clutched her arm. It was Dick, looking more woe-begone than usual.

"Oh, Miss, weren't it awful?" he wailed. "H'I never *could* do nothin' when they shout at me, Miss."

It took Jane a few seconds to realise he was not referring to the negroes yelling, but to his own fiasco with the clapper board. She made suitable sympathetic noises and shook him off. There was a fevered consultation going on and Jane hovered on the edge of it. She was not anxious to return to the spot rail. To her relief they decided not to take again, and the magic word 'break' was echoed round the studio.

The next day was the last of the production and Irene had already asked Jane to go to the office when they had finished so that they could check the script together and see there was nothing left undone, apart from the scheduled shots for the last day. The big set on which they were finishing to-day was to be 'struck' that evening and there would be no chance to-morrow to remedy any omissions or errors. Jane understood that it was therefore absolutely essential that the most careful checking be done, especially as the two hundred negroes would certainly not be available after to-day.

She found Irene still busy typing and asked if there was anything she could do till she was ready.

"Thanks, Jane," said Irene gratefully, "I would like you to check the camera and sound footage for me, if you will."

"Of course I will."

"Thank you, Jane. Here are my notes. Can you read the figures?"

Jane took the notebook. "Of course. You're so tidy. Will I come straight to the Production office after?"

"Yes, Jane."

They smiled at each other. In the three weeks they had been together they had reduced conversation on the set to a minimum, sure of each other's co-operation. As Jane turned away, Irene called after her. "Oh, Jane, there is one more thing you could do. Slip across to John's office and ask if we can have all the available stills of this set for matching up to-morrow. Would you mind?"

At the first mention of John Lang's name, Jane's heart had quickened. She had never yet been into his office, nor seen his studio. He always smiled at her when he came on the set, but seldom stopped to talk, except sometimes to Irene. Jane thought he was the most charming and quite the best-looking man she had ever seen. And everyone seemed to like him. He was obviously someone quite exceptional. She had told her father about him and he had been a little inclined to pull her leg. "A spot of hero-worship, eh?" he had suggested slyly. "Well, it won't do you any harm so long as you don't take yourself seriously."

She had been a little indignant about this. It was all very well for her father to tell her not to take herself seriously, but he didn't know John. Now Mary was more indulgent and demanded the most scrupulous details of his appearance, so that she seemed to Jane the nicest sister anyone ever had, for to talk about John Lang was the most delightful occupation imaginable, and one that she most reluctantly abandoned only in the face of the more obvious marks of boredom in her listeners. Her mother had been particularly short with her in this respect and told her tartly not to get her head turned over one of those 'matinée idols'. This, to Jane, was the end. To describe John Lang in terms used for musical comedy actors was more than she could bear and she had, on that occasion, actually walked out of the room, her head high, her cheeks burning, and banged the door behind her. To her surprise this act was never subsequently remarked upon.

Now Irene was asking her to go and see John in his own office and talk to him about stills. From being tired, hot and irritable she became animated and joyful. She rushed off to check the footages and did not remark that Irene gazed after her rather thoughtfully for some seconds.

The sound footage was soon checked. Then she went and found the camera staff. They were all packed up and only George was there. Jane had already had a few words with George on various occasions and disliked him more and more. He was so patently out to be rude that she was quite at a disadvantage as to how to deal with him. Her heart sank a little, but she put on a bold front.

"Can I check the camera footages?" she asked, trying to keep the animosity out of her voice.

He looked up, the inevitable chewing gum in his mouth, his dark eyes insolent.

"You?"

She felt irritation rising, but controlled it. There was such a world of surprise and contempt in that one syllable.

"Yes. Irene is too busy."

"Oh, so she's too busy?"

Jane kept silent, biting her lower lip. He got up and moved across to a table and flicked open a book. Without looking at her he said, "There you are."

She went to the table and started comparing the two lots of figures. Aware that he was watching her, she missed her mark and turned over pages unnecessarily.

Taking a long time, aren't you?" he said at last.

He kept her head down. "I don't want to make a mistake."

I assure you *I* haven't made any mistake. You mean that Irene may have made a mistake?"

Jane set her teeth. "Anyone can make a mistake."

Especially a woman."

Her guard was down. "Why do you say that?"

He met her eyes coolly. "Women are temperamentally

unfit for jobs that require precision. "They are not meant for it."

"Then why don't boys do Continuity?"

He shrugged. "I think because typing and shorthand are necessary and boys don't as a rule go in for them. That will no doubt be altered when Continuity comes under Trade Union conditions, as it will shortly. Boys will then think it worth while to learn typing and shorthand with a view to doing Continuity."

Jane kept her voice steady. "And you really think the results will be better?"

He removed his chewing gum from one side of his mouth to the other. "Sure. It's annoying to have a girl about. You can't talk, swear and carry on as you would if the Unit were all men."

All her mother's instinct rose in Jane. Up went her chin and her eyes flashed. "And a good thing, too," she said. "It does no one any harm to control themselves and be decent."

To her surprise he did not reply at once, but slowly smiled—even grinned. But he did not give in.

"Sez you."

She ticked the last footage, closed the book and turned away feeling sure she had won a victory, if a very small one.

"Good-night, George."

"'Night."

She went on, wondering if he was aware that she had caught him for once without an answer. But he was so thick-skinned. Now John . . .

She went out of the side door and into the cold wintry evening. The sky was high and clear and far, far away and everything was still. Her rubber-soled shoes made no sound. She felt light, detached, floating. She was going to see John and talk to him. . . .

His studio was in the main office block, but when she reached the door marked STILLS DEPT. she hesitated, her excitement and assurance gone. He might be busy,

annoyed at being interrupted. Finally she knocked timidly. A voice, his voice, called "Come in," and she turned the handle and pushed open the door.

He was standing at a long table which ran down one side of the room examining negatives against a strong light. There was a desk and chairs, rows of filing cabinets and a door at the far end of the room, which Jane thought must lead to the studio. He turned and smiled briefly over his shoulder.

"Oh, it's Jane. Come in and shut the door."

His manner was friendly but preoccupied. She did as she was told and waited. He put down the negatives and turned to her enquiringly, then held up his hand, saying quickly: "Don't tell me. I know. Is it stills for Continuity?"

She laughed. "You've guessed. Here is a list of them he wants for to-morrow, if you would be kind enough——"

He took the list, smiling quickly with his eyes crinkling up at the corners. "I don't know what Continuity would do without me." He read rapidly. "Um. I think I've got all those." He went swiftly to one of the filing cabinets, unlocked it open and began to turn over folders, pulling out a sheet here and there and checking it off on the list.

Jane glanced round the room. There were some lovely engagements on the walls; actors and actresses she supposed, who had been photographed by John. She was attracted to one of a young girl and moved over to get a closer view.

"Like it?"

"Yes. It's lovely. Was she really as beautiful as that?"

He laughed shortly. "Of course not. False eyelashes, make-up and good photography—particularly the latter—" He gave her one of his sidelong, quizzical glances—"and no girl can look glamorous."

She thought he was serious. "Really?"

He dropped the teasing and came over to her with the

"You'll learn, Jane, that half I say is leg-pulling. Here are the stills. I'd like to photograph you, as I've said before."

She felt a blush mounting her cheeks, grabbed the stills and shuffled through them in embarrassment. "Is that leg-pulling too?"

He laughed. "No. You're photogenic. The sort of face any photographer can do something with—even a bad one."

She felt bolder. "And you're not a bad one?"

"That's the idea. I'll do you some for nothing—just for practice."

Her heart leapt with excitement. "No, really?"

He grinned at her. "Now you look like a child that's been given some sweets. Fix it with Irene. She knows the best times for us both."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Lang, I will."

"And not so much of the Mister, Jane. We're all equal on the Unit."

She blushed this time, unable to stop herself. "All right, John." She turned and fled.

Once outside she walked rapidly, hardly knowing which way she was going. It was not until she found herself at the studio door that she realised she had promised to meet Irene in the Production office. She turned back slowly, ticking herself off silently for being a fool. Did John really think she was beautiful? No, photogenic, he had said—that need not imply beauty. She glanced at herself surreptitiously as she passed a mirror. Flushed as she was, with sparkling eyes, she looked her best. She thought "I've seen many film stars not so good-looking—I wonder if I could be a film actress?" And the thought, rejected when he had first mentioned it jokingly, returned the more strongly. From being a joke it now became a possibility. She paused outside the office door, putting her vain ideas from her, then went in.

That night she did not mention her interview with John Lang to her sister or to her father, but enlarged

on her dislike of George and how she had got the better of him.

She woke with a beautiful sense of anticipation and lay for a few moments contemplating the square of light at the window, vaguely pink from the chintz curtains drawn across. Of course, it was the last day of production and there was no hurry. She was not due till nine o'clock in the small studio where a set representing the beach of the cannibal island (the main scene of which had been shot yesterday) was to be ready. One or two shots and a few close-ups and they were through—free! At the same time as she experienced a thrill of freedom, she had a curious sense of emptiness, almost of nostalgia. Her days had been for a space so full, so concentrated, so disciplined, that the thought of having 'nothing to do' was rather terrifying.

At five minutes to nine she joined Irene in the Production Office, and found she had been there since half-past eight, helping through the remaining shots with Jim.

"You're far too conscientious," objected Jane, aware that today this would be her responsibility.

Jim only smiled. She knew that Jane would do the work when it was necessary. They finished the checking together and then went through to the small studio.

The place was in a mess. It was littered with carpenters' shavings, dead bits of tree and bush, heaps of gravel and sand and pools of water. In the middle of a barrage of lamps stood the cannibal island. It was most ingenious. Sand and gravel formed a credible sloping beach set on a platform, one end of which was gathered up into a basin. This was filled with water which, on being inspected by the comedian who was supposed to crawl out of it, was pronounced 'feelthy'. Behind the beach grew luxuriant tropical plants and trees. A convenient log lay on the edge of the jungle.

The scene was one in which the comedian and the hero crawled out of the Atlantic, sat on the log and were hit on

the head by the cannibals. It linked with the previous day's takes of the two hundred negroes.

Rehearsals were tedious, for the natives were slow to understand their 'business'. Finally, however, it was decided to risk a take. The cameras turned over. The number was given. The bell buzzed. The Director paused before giving the word for action.

In that second Jane saw a script lying on the 'beach' in full view of the camera. Even in a dream an audience would not expect to find a film script on a cannibal beach. There was no time to tell anyone. Even as Mr. Barnes opened his mouth to say 'Action', Jane shot past the astonished Irene, tripped over a lamp foot, snatched the script and bolted out of picture again, falling neatly into Jim's arms.

Mr. Barnes gulped. "Action," he said.

"Good girl," whispered Jim, carefully putting her back on her feet.

The take was destined to be full of incident. One of the natives became so nervous waiting for his cue that when he brought the club down on the comedian's head, he did so with unnecessary force. The crack as it met the unfortunate victim's skull made everyone cringe. The comedian collapsed, as he was supposed to do. The natives carried off the two 'corpses'.

"Cut," said Mr. Barnes frantically, and rushed to see the damage, half the Unit behind him.

From somewhere Irene produced a glass of water and pushed through the crowd. Jane was left standing by the desk alone, but for George, who, nonchalant as usual, lounged by his camera. He met Jane's eye, then, with the merest twist of his lips, no doubt caused through changing his chewing gum from one side of his mouth to the other, he turned away.

Jane, still somewhat shaken by her rush to retrieve the script, felt rage boil up in her. At least George might have made some comment either about her timely action or about

the unfortunate comedian. But no, he thought of no one but himself. He was the most selfish man she had ever met ! Determined to make him notice her she marched up to him and said defiantly : " Footage, please."

He paused, then looked slowly into the camera. " Three hundred and thirty."

" Thanks."

" Not at all."

She turned away, more furious than ever. It was impossible to get through his thick skin.

From the crowd there was a roar of laughter and Irene came back to the desk, grinning broadly. Apparently the comedian had asked Mr. Barnes if he wanted to take again. If so, would it be all right for Continuity if he arrived at the island wearing a steel helmet ?

The crack put everyone in a good humour. Mr. Barnes came up to Jane herself and congratulated her on her smart bit of Continuity, especially as they would have been unable to take again, owing to the blow on the comedian's head. Jane felt soothed and hoped George was listening.

The remaining close-ups were soon finished and by tea time the last shot was ' in the can '.

In the café several of the Unit congratulated Jane and it was suggested that a party be made up to go to the local Hall of Amusements to celebrate the last day of production. The Boy and Jim warmly pressed Irene and Jane to join them. Irene declined, but Jane, exhilarated by their friendliness, accepted.

In a burst of enthusiasm seven of them packed into a small sports car and drove to the hall. Inside it was crowded and hot. Lights winked and blazed everywhere. Tunes from merry-go-rounds and side-shows vied discordantly with each other, while the pop of rifles, the crash of the electric cars bumping and the noise of broken bottles at the cocoanut shies punctuated the general roar like great full stops.

Jane chatted about with Jim and The Boy, feeling a little

apart and self-conscious. Then they got sucked in. They shoved pennies across gaudily checked boards and raked in rewards and lost them again. They checked the cocoanut shiers and cleaned out the houp-la stall, staggering away with pockets full of watches with no insides and strange bits of china inscribed with admonitions, such as "Keep Smiling" in garish colours.

They stopped near the merry-go-round which consisted of huge animals made to seat two persons each. The Boy insisted on a round and Jane found herself on the neck of an ostrich, with Jim behind her on its back and The Boy on its tail. Three persons were not allowed, but no one noticed before they were off. It was a very old machine and seemed to have rheumatism, for the ostrich shot upwards in a series of jerks. The Boy gave falsetto screams of "Mother!" and clung round Jim's neck, nearly strangling him. Jane slipped sideways at every jerk and hoped she wasn't going to fall. It was an odd sensation. As she went up the animal next to her on the outer ring went down. It made her feel slightly seasick. The music was very loud and harsh. She had laughed a lot and taken in a quantity of stale air. She felt exhilarated and silly.

When that round was over the two others refused to get off. There was a brief argument with the attendant who was worsted by everyone shouting to be off.

This time The Boy insisted on changing places with Jim in mid-ride. Jane found herself used as a 'steadier' in the process and had to cling desperately to the ostrich's head. The Boy reached the middle place facing the wrong way and leaning heavily on her, back to back. Jim had one leg over the tail and the other touching the ground when he went down and waving widely in the air when he went up. In order to stay on at all he was leaning on the shoulder of a complete stranger who occupied the horse on the outer ring. The stranger objected, not without reason, for every time the two steeds went in opposite directions, he was

nearly torn off. Jim clutched him amiably and assured him he couldn't help himself. While the argument went on The Boy called on his mother and made hunting noises. The din was fearful. Jane clung to the ostrich's head, weak with laughter, her cheeks and sides aching.

At the end of the round they had to get off. The attendant was firm.

Some time later, after they had attempted to dance and given it up because of the crush, The Boy announced a terrific hunger. Jane agreed with him. They decided to call it a day and pushed their way out. It was a cold, crisp night with a full moon. After the heat and noise inside it seemed like heaven. Jane climbed into the back of the sports car. The rest of the party were nowhere to be seen.

Away they went, excitement causing Jim to drive somewhat recklessly. At a convenient spot near her home, Jane was dropped and stood waving good-bye to them. Then she turned up her road, drawing in deep gulps of air. The break was just what she had needed to relax her tired body and mind after over three weeks of production.

She let herself in at the front door and called out: "Here I am, everybody!" She opened the living-room door. They were there, all three of the family. "What about some food?" she demanded. "We've finished production."

"And we've finished supper hours ago," said her mother, rising to her five feet two inches. But she went out to the kitchen at once.

Her father looked at her glowing cheeks and eyes. "There'll be another," he said.

Jane met his eyes with understanding. Her father had a way of saying just what she felt.

"And I did my first bit of real continuity—saved a retake," added Jane joyously. "And Mr. Barnes congratulated me."

"That's the girl."

She went over and kissed the top of his head.

“ Tell us, tell us ! ” clamoured Mary.

Jane sat down and prepared to give a detailed account of the day. She was at home and warm and supper was coming. It was good to be nineteen, alive and to have won one's spurs.

IV. A BAD DAY

JANE awoke with a terrific start. What was happening? The alarm clock was going off. She seized it and pressed blindly. It went on raving. Maddened she moved her fingers and found the right spot. It stopped. She lay back, shaking with relief.

6.30 a.m. She had gone to bed the night before about midnight. She wondered vaguely how Mr. Newbolt, the Director of the new production, was. She felt sure he was sickening for 'flu.

Only two days after the last production, when life had seemed so good, she and Irene had been rushed on to the next script, a translation from the German. The scheduled production had been postponed owing to the illness of the leading man, no suitable substitute being available, so the next one had been pushed forward. This meant extra work all round. Somehow the script had been got together (there were still scenes waiting to be put in) and production arranged in ten days.

On the first day two of the minor part actors did not appear owing to 'flu. On the following day it became obvious that the Director was ill. He had come in on the third day, yesterday, but looked awful. Jane had spent a dreadful evening with him trying to take down script but very little had been accomplished; then she had stayed on to type out her notes. She felt certain he would not appear on the set to-day.

Unfortunately that did not let her out, so she tumbled out of bed, gazing with envy on her sleeping sister Mary who, free from the call of work, had not even heard the alarm. Mechanically she pulled on her clothes, aware that it was cold and still dark. Then she crept downstairs. Her mother was up, the kettle on and bacon sizzling in the pan.

"Mother!" said Jane, "you are terrible. I said you weren't to get up."

Her mother gave her a withering glance. "As if I'd let you go out on a morning like this without a good breakfast."

"Why, is the weather bad?"

"Thick fog."

Jane groaned, sat down and ate her breakfast heartily, aware that her mother had definite attributes. Almost asleep again over a cup of tea she saw the clock, exclaimed and jumped up in a hurry, gathered her things together, kissed her mother and fled. She was due to pick up Jim's car at 7.45 a.m.

Outside the front door she paused in dismay. There was indeed a thick fog. The houses opposite loomed above her, indistinct, menacing. The street lamps shone wanly. She turned and walked quickly to her rendezvous. There was not a soul about.

Once there she stamped up and down trying to keep her feet warm. 8 a.m. by her watch and not a sign of the car. Of course the fog had delayed him. Now they would all be late at the studio. There was a huge crowd to struggle with—but it occurred to her that they would be late too, which was a consolation.

Eventually the car arrived, driven by Jim and containing someone obstinately asleep in the back who looked like The Boy. The door swung open.

"Sorry—couldn't make it before."

Jane climbed in. "Think we'll ever get there?"

"It may not be so bad on the by-pass."

He crawled the car cautiously. Reached the by-pass. It was plain sailing then and Jim stepped on the accelerator. The speedometer mounted to thirty—thirty-five—forty. They wouldn't be late after all.

"Heavens!"

Swerve. All the brakes jammed on. Skid. Stop.

Jane looked back. There was a huge lorry blocking half the road, a car nestled up beside it. An A.A. Patrol man was taking notes from the two drivers who stood dis-

consolately huddled in their overcoats. A policeman was walking towards them.

"What the——?" demanded Jim, his head thrust out of the window.

"Sorry, sir," said the Law. "Impossible to signal. Didn't see you coming."

"You should have used your torch then. I nearly piled up on that lot."

"Very sorry, sir,"

The constable was young and pink-checked and worried. Jim relented. "All right."

"Thank you, sir."

Off they went, more slowly.

"Bats!" said The Boy. And went to sleep again.

The fog became worse. After a while it seemed certain Jim had missed the way. Jane hung out of the side window, straining her eyes for landmarks, but there were none.

"Whasser time?" demanded The Boy.

The phosphorus dial on the switchboard said 8.45. Jane told him. He went to sleep again.

It was 9.40 a.m. when they crawled up the drive to the offices. Jane flung out of the car, shot across the main hall into the cloakroom, dropped her things and, script under arm, literally ran to the studio through the centrally-heated dressing-room corridor. There was no red light over the studio door. Good. They were not shooting yet. She struggled with the handle and went in.

The place had a dejected air. There were only a few 'working' lights on. The set was bare of people, except for a few carpenters and the Art Director. One or two of the sound staff were engaged in fixing up the microphone. No one else was visible.

Jane turned back into the dressing-rooms and walked through to the Production office. Mr. Stratton was there. No sign of Irene.

"Oh, you're here," he said.

"Yes," said Jane, "but where are the crowd?"

"On the way—I hope." He looked down at his schedule and charts. "Heaven knows when we'll get started."

"How is Mr. Newbolt?"

"Temperature 104 last night. 'Flu.'"

Jane stared in dismay. "Then who is going to direct? The translation of the ballroom scene isn't done yet, you know."

"I know. But he says he's coming into the studio."

Jane groaned. "We'll all get it. Can't you imagine the germs breeding under the arc lamps?"

He laughed, his curious, hooded eyes snapping. "You've a morbid mind, Jane."

Jim, paler than usual, burst in. "Crowd's here—screaming for coffee. What's happened to the café staff?"

"Not turned up. Gilbert is the only one about and he's been up all night with Mr. Newbolt who stayed at the house."

"What shall I do?"

"Tell 'em to come over and get made up and coffee will follow. Thank heaven Arthur is here at least. He never lets us down."

"Good old Arthur," said Jim fervently. (He was the make-up man, Jane knew.) "Right. I'll tell 'em coffee will follow."

He exited rapidly.

"Save the lie," murmured Mr. Stratton.

At 11.30 a.m. the Unit, gathered together at last, were treated to an exclusive view of a most edifying spectacle. Mr. Newbolt, the Director, wrapped in a Teddy Bear coat, his head tied up in a woollen muffler, came on to the set followed by a retinue consisting of his personal secretary carrying a rug and a hot-water bottle, a kitchen boy with a fearful cold carrying a tray on which was medicine, a bottle of champagne, a carafe of water and two glasses, and lastly a page, with a special chair in chromium and leather marked DIRECTOR.

Jane was standing with Irene and Jim. He, or someone



The set was bare of people except for a few carpenters and the Art Director

(facing p. 50)



close by, hummed the Dead March under their breath. Mr. Newbolt was lowered into the chair and sat, sunk in his overcoat, the tip of a very red nose protruding above his scarf. He was tucked into his rug with his hot-water bottle. After which gloom descended on the studio.

As time went on Mr. Newbolt's voice disappeared and he could only direct in whispers via his secretary. He drank a lot of champagne. The gloom deepened. No one would go nearer to him than they could help. Jane thought his secretary a heroine to let him breathe all over her like that. Irene's brow was furrowed. She drew Jane aside and said quietly: "Look here, Jane—he's taking shots wildly—not in the script at all—we're bound to have a hitch later on. Will you go and ask John to come on the set and take some stills for matching?"

Only too glad to get out of the studio, and on such an errand, Jane dashed out, through the dressing-room corridor, past the Production office and into the main building. So wrapped in thought was she that she did not notice a stranger in the hall, until suddenly Mr. Stratton's voice behind her said: "Oh, doctor, will you come this way?"

She turned and saw Mr. Stratton leading the doctor back the way she had come. She heard the doctor say "Serious?" and Mr. Stratton reply. "Heart failure, I think."

For a few seconds she did not fully grasp the significance of the words. Did he mean someone had died of heart failure? She stood, watching them. They were going into the dressing-rooms. It must be an artiste. She turned on her way more slowly, chilled.

John was not in his office, nor in his studio. She left a note on his desk and then went to the switchboard operator and asked her to contact him if possible and say there was a note on his desk. Then she returned to the studio. She had to wait a couple of minutes outside the door, for the red light showed that they were shooting.

Hardly had she entered when Mr. Stratton came in and

spoke to Mr. Newbolt. The latter looked as if he had been struck and hastily swallowed some more champagne.

The news soon got round. One of the crowd who was to play a train guard (the set was a big railway terminus) had died of heart failure owing to the cold. Jane could not help wondering if a cup of hot coffee would have saved him.

Whether it was the shock of the news, the champagne or a mounting temperature, no one knew, but Mr. Newbolt became light-headed. He started to scream through his hoarseness with horrible effect. It was very trying. He had suddenly got the idea into his head that the guard of the train (one of the crowd had been bundled into uniform and his pay put up as he had to speak a line) was to shout "Stand away, please!" on the same note on which the regimental band ended its fanfare in honour of the hero's departure. It was a very high note or a very low note, depending on the octave. The wretched man, suddenly finding himself playing opera and not being a singer, was diffident. He tried the lower octave. This did not please Mr. Newbolt. He screamed out the line himself, horribly off-key and then raved at the man, who could not reach the high note without his voice cracking.

Various members of the Unit tried to persuade Mr. Newbolt that the idea was not worth the trouble, but he became quite feverish about it, swallowed more medicine washed down with champagne and roared pitifully in his hoarse voice, "Get me another guard! I won't have this man! Take him away! Take him away!"

Jim hastened the discomfited man away out of sight, then began a wild search for a substitute. Likely ones were lined up but Mr. Newbolt would have none of them. He was half asleep anyhow and hardly knew where he was. It was checkmate. A corpse in the dressing-rooms and a delirious Director in the studio.

Finally Mr. Stratton led the Managing Director on to the set. He gave one look at Mr. Newbolt and bore him forcibly away, telling Jim to carry on.

Irene groaned. She and Jane knew the script was far from complete.

During the next hour or so Jim made the discovery that there were several people in the studio, including one of the crowd, who were just thirsting to direct a picture. They made suggestions. The leading artistes became first harassed and then indignant. Mr. Stratton again saved the situation by bringing in the Managing Director for the second time. Between them they gave orders which produced some result. But Jane noticed that Irene's good-natured little face was unusually grim.

By the afternoon there was no heart in anyone. Several of the electricians had gone sick. The Chief Cameraman, Atraker, looked terrible. The Second Camera assistant had been sick in the Production office and had been sent home.

At tea time Mr. MacPherson, the Managing Director, called a halt and announced that everyone was to go home early and turn up at the usual time in the morning, when he hoped to have a new Director to take over for a few days until Mr. Newbolt was well enough to carry on.

The following day was like a nightmare. Irene was ill and Jane implored her to go home at once and get it over. She set her obstinate little mouth and refused even to discuss it. Jane told John when he came into the studio. He disappeared and returned with hot rum which he poured down Irene's throat, despite her protests. He stayed on the set and took innumerable stills. He constantly turned to Jane and asked her to do things for Irene. She would have done them anyhow, but she liked John to ask her. She felt important and had not the least feeling of illness.

The new Director arrived at midday. In a very short while it became apparent he was useless, and no one really blamed him, for the script was, at that point, quite incomplete. There was a conference and Jane was sent for by Mr. MacPherson. He asked her to go to Mr. Newbolt's house and take down some dictation re-writing the big

ballroom scene that was to be shot on the following day. Dismayed and full of apprehension, Jane went.

It was a fantastic experience. She found Mr. Newbolt propped up in bed and surrounded by anxious females, his wife, a nurse and his secretary. He indicated that he wished to be alone while he dictated. They left the room. For a while he moaned about how ill he was and how hot the room was, which Jane presumed must mean he had a temperature, for it was in fact rather cold. She managed at length to turn his thoughts to the script, anxious to get it over. He started dictating. There were long pauses and Jane felt impelled to help. After an hour she found herself practically writing the dialogue herself. The dictation went something like this :

MR. N. : Cut to medium shot. The two men glare at each other. Sir Percy. . . .

JANE : (after long pause) Yes, what does Sir Percy say ?

MR. N. : I'm ill.

JANE : I know. (Pause.) What does Sir Percy say ?

MR. N. : Read out the translation. What does it say ?

JANE : (referring to translation) You should know by intuition.

MR. N. : (vaguely) I should ?

JANE : No. That's what it says.

MR. N. : Who ?

JANE : Sir Percy.

MR. N. : Oh. All right. Put it down.

JANE : (after pause) Is it meant to be funny ?

MR. N. : (groaning) It was funny in German.

JANE : If you'll excuse me, I don't think it is in English.

MR. N. : (after long pause, sinking into pillow) *you* make it funny.

JANE : (taken aback, but not beaten) Well, let me see—the Ambassador is telling off his young attaché for flirting with a married woman. The attaché says how was he to know she was a married woman . . . the Ambassador replies . . .

MR. N. : What ? (Dozcs.)

JANE : (cnthusiastically) Instinct ! The Ambassador
TOLIE just one word—instinct ! That'll get a laugh.

MR. N. : (weakly) Will it ?

JANE : Shall I put it down ?

MR. N. : Yes, do.

JANE : (after long pause) What then ?

MR. N. : I'm ill.

JANE : Yes, I know. What about the dialogue ?

MR. N. : The dialogue ? Yes. How does the translation
go ?

JANE : (referring to translation) It's a cut to the dancing.

MR. N. : Good. That's easy. Describe the scene.

JANE : (copying scene) Shall I read it to you ?

MR. N. : (waking up) Read what ?

JANE : The description of the dancing scene.

MR. N. : I'm ill.

JANE : Yes, Mr. Newbolt. Listen to this—

MR. N. : Where's the thermometer ?

It was at this point that he discovered his temperature
was 102 and sent Jane out to call in all the females again.
There was no more dictation.

Jane returned to the studio, made several carbon copies
of the little she had taken down and handed them round
the Unit. The news that Mr. Newbolt was no better was
received with something like despair. Everyone muttered
that the production should be closed down. They were
funking the ballroom scene, scheduled for the following day.

As Jane left the set John came hurrying up to her, a
determined look in his eyes. He said quietly : "Jane,
come into the Production office and back me up."

Jane followed, wondering what it was about.

Irene was seated at her desk, her head on her hands,
obviously done to the wide world. Mr. Stratton hovered
about looking anxious. John went and sat on the corner
of the desk.

"Irene," he said firmly, "here is Jane. She has taken

down the whole of the ballroom scene from Mr. Newbolt and knows much better than you do what he wants. I can stay on the set and be Continuity for her. Together we shall manage beautifully, won't we, Jane?"

A flood of delight swept over her. He had linked their names together, joining them in a bond of comradeship. There was nothing she would not attempt after that.

"Of course," she said. "Go to bed Irene and just forget everything. It'll be all right."

Irene raised her head and looked dully at Jane, trying to smile. "You're a sport, Jane. I'll have to, I think."

John led her away, throwing a beaming smile over his shoulder at Jane. She turned to Mr. Stratton who was saying something, feeling quite light-headed, for John had smiled specially for her. And he would be close by her side all the next day. . . .

When the next day came, however, Jane found herself too busy to notice if John were there or not. She had a big crowd to check up and the new Director called for her continually. He was completely out of his depth and obviously terrified of getting 'flu. He left the studio to gargle between every shot and kept begging everyone to do the same.

Finally the evil hour the Unit had been dreading all the morning arrived—they had to do a long tracking shot with one camera and cover the scene in Mid Shot with a second camera. There was only one operator and that was George. Straker's eyes were flowing water and though he could light the set and the artistes he couldn't see through a camera. He did not look as if he would last the day. The third camera assistant had to do the focusing for the track and simply could not be spared for the second camera. The other Unit was many miles away on location and could not be recalled. Mr. Stratton had talked himself hoarse on the 'phone trying to borrow an operator. Most studios were in the same predicament with the 'flu epidemic and could not spare staff.

After much argument it was decided that The Boy would have to operate the second camera. For an hour, while the set was being lit, he went about quietly whistling, hands in his pockets, a glory in his eyes.

The question then arose as to who was to pull the camera truck? The shot was covering a scene ending in a duet between hero and heroine and the Sound staff, short-handed already, could not spare a man. The electricians were short-handed also and had a positive army of lamps to attend to. It was decided it was impossible to risk using a carpenter, painter or plasterer, for they would not understand the requirements—besides their Unions might object. Jim had got to back up the Director. There remained the two Prop men, John Lang and Mr. Stratton. They almost called in the Managing Director, but refrained. The joke cheered the Unit somewhat.

To make matters worse the dinner had been awful. The café staff was so depleted that the food had been undercooked and served half cold. And there was no coffee. Now it was nearly tea-time and everyone kept looking hopefully towards the studio door to see if the tea trolley was on the way.

Deaf to all deficiencies, Mr. Stratton O.K.ed the big scene after only one take. Even Angus, unhappy though he was, dared not ask for another. The Boy, elevated on his seat behind the second camera, looked flushed and triumphant. No doubt he was dreaming of immediate promotion.

Still no tea trolley.

The hero and heroine were lined up for two big close-ups, first of the heroine singing to the hero, he 'cheated' in profile, and then vice versa. Jane wondered vaguely while they were taking why the lighting on the heroine looked so queer and why when they subsequently took the hero, his face looked so dark, but she felt too confused to mention it. A few minutes later she realised that the Director and Jim were having a heated argument about covering the song

with a Close Shot from a side angle. She listened for a moment and seeing that Jim was losing his point, which was to take the shot, she went up to him and timidly jerked his arm. He broke off, glaring at her, his pale face seeming almost green with exhaustion.

"Jim," she said hurriedly, in a low voice, "do the side angle shot. I'm quite sure something was wrong with the lighting of the two close-ups."

"What d'you mean?"

She weakened, then stood her ground. "Were the close-ups supposed to be of the one singing or the one listening?"

"Singing, of course."

"Well, they weren't lit that way. Straker lit the one listening. I'm sure."

He looked at her disbelievingly. "We'll ask Straker."

They looked about for him. He was seated at the Continuity desk, his head on the typewriter. When taxed with the query he did not seem to be able to collect his thoughts. He felt ill. He had 'flu. He was going to die. Especially if there was no tea within two minutes—or less.

Nothing more could be got out of him, so Jim told the Director and the scene was shot from a side angle. Jane stood looking at her typewriter covered with Cameraman and decided that she didn't want to type—much.

"Are you all right, Jane?"

It was John. He seemed concerned. She made an effort and smiled. "Quite all right, John."

He looked at her seriously. "You're doing splendidly. Irene will be very grateful."

She felt the blush that would come creeping up her face and turned away. "I couldn't have done it without you."

"Most girls couldn't have done it at all after so little experience. Where's that typist they sent on the set to help you?"

Jane looked round. "Heaven knows, I haven't seen her

since this morning. The Boy told me before lunch that she was flirting with one of the crowd behind a set."

John's face hardened. "The devil she was! I'll fix that." He strode off purposefully.

In a few minutes he returned piloting the girl, who seemed quite unaware that she had been doing anything out of the way.

"Did you want me?" she asked Jane, surprised.

Jane was irritated. "Of course. There's a lot of typing to do." She looked over to her desk and was relieved to see that Straker had removed himself. John saw the direction of her gaze and pulled his mouth down.

"Straker's been sent home."

The typist sat at the desk and began to bang out Jane's notes rather sulkily. A quarter of an hour later she was nowhere to be found. Jane shouted out for her, furious. No answer.

"She can't hear you," said George from his camera seat. He looked sardonic. "Too busy."

"What d'you mean? She hasn't done a thing all day."

"She's busy all right." He jerked his head. "Over there."

Jane followed the direction of his nod and saw her behind the lights talking coyly to a beautiful young man.

"Women are no good," said George.

Jane's anger suddenly boiled up and over. "Of course, if you judge by *that* type!" she said cuttingly. She was aware of the annoyed look that reached George's face before he could stop it and felt satisfied. At last she had got under his skin.

John was waiting by her desk. "Shall I get rid of the girl?" he asked.

Jane sat down wearily. "I wish you would. She's no good and gets on my nerves."

He went away and returned in a few minutes, grinning. "She's gone. I said she looked ill and hadn't she better

leave the set? She jumped at the chance. The young man had followed her."

"Good riddance," said Jane.

Tea arrived. It was cold.

A few more shots were taken, the Chief Electrician directing the lighting. Then the heroine retired to her dressing-room and refused to go on. There was a pause.

Finally the ultimatum came from the Managing Director. All shots on the ballroom scene must be finished. He had got the various Unions concerned to agree to an extension, if necessary. After that production would close down until after Christmas and Mr. Newbolt would continue directing.

Feverishly Jim went through the remaining shots with Jane. There was half a day's work, as he had supposed.

They worked on.

No break for supper. Coffee and sandwiches had been ordered on the set. They were a long time coming but at last Gilbert, more gaunt and furious than usual, arrived with the trolley. There were piles of sandwiches and huge pots of coffee, actually steaming. A sigh passed over the studio. All eyes watched him eagerly as he pushed through props and lamps. Mr. MacPherson himself, expansive and beaming, followed like a presiding genius who has magically conjured up just what was required, the inevitable cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth.

"Come on, boys!" he called cheerfully.

Invigorated by this pressing invitation all rushed for the trolley. Gilbert turned on his heel with the air of wiping the dust of everyone from off his feet.

Crash!

Jane, who had been following in the wake of the rush, stood stock still. The coffee had been knocked over between the half dozen hands reaching for it and now streamed over the lower tray containing the sandwiches and dripped merrily on to the floor.

Mr. MacPherson looked at Gilbert. Gilbert looked at Mr. MacPherson.

"No more bread," he said briefly. And left the studio.

The Unit resignedly drank half cups of coffee from the remaining urn and hoped for the other half later.

Time did not matter after that. They were fatalistic.

When the hero sat on some black paint and it was discovered he had not a second pair of trousers, everyone agreed it was finally the last straw. A shot of him walking away from camera back view simply had to be taken. The Property Master was sent out to look for a new pair of trousers at 8.30 p.m. The Unit polished off the remaining shots.

10 p.m. No trousers.

The heroine burst into tears and Mr. MacPherson was sent for. Jane simply sat at her desk and stared. She no longer had any idea if she was matching up shots or not. No one else seemed to care. John sat near her, his head in his hands saying unprintable things about the management in general and about the Director in particular. His being there was the only thing that prevented Jane from bursting into tears herself.

At 11.30 p.m. the Property Master returned. He looked older but he had the trousers.

At a quarter to one the last shot was 'in the can'—at least Jane frantically hoped it was the last required on that set. Everyone, including The Boy, had searched through the script to be sure.

Jane hardly remembered clearing up, checking footages or leaving the studio. She could only think of her comfortable bed and remember that she had not even found time to 'phone her mother. When she emerged from the cloakroom John was waiting for her, dressed to go.

"The studio car is taking you home," he said. "I didn't want you to think I'd deserted you, but as you know, I live locally."

Jane thanked him warmly. He always seemed to do the right thing. Suddenly, to her awful embarrassment he took

her hand and pressed it hard, so hard that she only just bit back a cry.

"You've been a brick, Jane. No one could have done more."

Then he had gone and she was holding her tingling fingers, his last words ringing through her ears. No one, no one, *no one* . . . he thought she was as clever as Irene! She felt dizzy with elation.

Eight of the Unit crammed into the waiting car. The chauffeur was pessimistic. He had been driving the Property Master for three hours. He was tired. The steering gear was defective. There was some fog. It appeared the car might drop to bits at any moment. No one was interested.

Jane waited till last, then to her dismay found she had to sit on someone's knee. It turned out to be Jim. The Boy clasped her legs amiably from his seat on the floor. They rocketed off.

There were three in the front seat which did not help the driver with his defective steering gear. To Jane's relief Jim promptly went to sleep and she relaxed and slid on to his chest. The electrician next to her was nodding. The Boy's head gradually went down onto her knee and bumped against it with every bump of the car. But he slept.

After a while she saw Arthur the Make-Up man's head sink gently on to the shoulder of the driver. Irritably he twitched it off. He lolled confidently over on to the shoulder of one of the Sound Engineers on his other side. At a particularly big bump The Boy woke up and started chattering excitedly, apparently under the impression that he was going to be Chief Cameraman, or at least Chief Operator, in no time. Jane answered him politely. Meanwhile the car gambolled along the road, much in the fashion of young lambs in spring. At various stages passengers were woken up and dropped off. At last only Jane and The Boy remained.

Jane got out at her corner.

"Good-night," said The Boy.

"Good morning," replied Jane.

"You're mistaken even then," he assured her.

He was right. As the car slid away in the semi-fog Jane shivered and, feeling rather like a starfish stranded on a beach, turned for home. It was cold. Her coat hung round her aching neck like a sack of coals. Her script under her arm weighed a ton. Her feet hurt.

She was overwhelmed by the stillness. The usually busy road seemed half the size now it was empty. A clock struck the half-hour. Two-thirty! Very faintly she could hear the rumble of a lorry and somewhere the sharp steps of a pedestrian.

She reached the front door and crept into the corridor. Silence. Thank heaven her mother was not up! She hesitated at the foot of the stairs, wondering if she had the energy to make herself a cup of cocoa. She hadn't. Bed was all that mattered.

She got undressed somehow. Oh, bliss—there was a still-hot water bottle in her bed. She hugged it and fell into a deep, deep sleep.

V. THE CUTTING ROOMS

JANE just managed to pull herself together after a dose of 'flu and the Christmas festivities and get back to the production as it re-opened a fortnight later.

Practically everyone had recovered. The epidemic was over.

The production swung along merrily, the gay music proving an effective tonic. Jane loved to listen when Mr. Western, the Musical Director, sat down at the grand piano, a cigarette hanging from one corner of his mouth, one eye closed against the smoke, and improvised. She could not help noticing that however bad tempers were, however rushed the Unit, when the first notes echoed round the studio they all stopped what they were doing and gradually wandered towards the piano. As they gathered round brows relaxed, faces were smoothed out, arguments forgotten, worries abandoned. Tired, dusty brains were swept clean by the magic broom of music.

Jane made a habit, during any lull between shots, of slipping up to Mr. Western and shyly asking him to play. He never required a second invitation.

One day when he had broken off abruptly from his playing to join a conference with Mr. Newbolt, and Jane was standing disappointedly by the piano, she heard someone say : " So you like music ? "

It was George.

She nodded, for somewhat to her surprise she had noticed that George, the bad-tempered, was one of the most consistent of the listeners.

" Yes, love it. My father is very musical. He takes me to concerts and has taught me a lot I could not have understood for myself."

" You don't play ? "

" Not since I left school. I don't do it well enough."

He did not reply, but she felt he approved of her reason. In that moment she almost liked him.

After the first week the tunes belonging to the production became stale, and Jane found herself bored. She considered that Irene did not let her do enough. She seemed to think Jane had learnt nothing and never trusted her word for a match-up, always checking it herself. Jane thought of having it out with her, but in the end did not. It hardly mattered, for surely she would get a chance to do a picture on her own soon ; then she would show them. Anyhow, John believed in her.

Towards the end of the production she found herself growing quite at home. Mr. Newbolt had been very grateful and even flattering about her carrying on in his absence, and for interpreting his wishes in the ballroom scene. Jane felt proud of herself. She did not see why her opinion was not as good as anyone's. They all said what they thought, even shouted it. She began to feel important and walked with her chin up. She was someone. She was aware that others looked at her. No doubt they were saying that she was clever, that she had saved the situation when Irene was taken ill, that she was really quite exceptional. . . .

The feeling grew.

She did not notice that Irene had become very silent with her ; and that George watched her while she was not looking and turned away when she came to the camera to look through or check up footage, nor that The Boy was always grinning at her in a cheeky way. She began to say what she thought, quite often and quite as loudly as anyone else.

One day there was an argument between Mr. Newbolt, Mr. Stratton and the Chief Electrician. A small set had been struck and all the available power moved out on to the lot for outside shooting at night. Mr. Newbolt, in his thoughtless way, suddenly wanted a close-up that was not in the script. He was insisting that he only wanted a ' flat ' (a wood and plaster board to represent a wall) and one or two lamps. The Chief Electrician had pointed out that he

would want more than that and that all the power had been moved outside. He was annoyed. Mr. Stratton was backing him up.

Jane, with nothing to do, listened. Mr. Newbolt had flattered her and she was on his side. She was annoyed also because it seemed to her that unnecessary obstructions were being put in Mr. Newbolt's way. No one had asked her opinion but, before she could stop herself, she had said loudly : " I don't see why Mr. Newbolt shouldn't have a ' flat ' and a lamp if he wants one."

There was a silence. Then the Head Electrician said gently : " What lamp do you suggest ? "

Refusing to see the sarcasm in the putting of such a question to her Jane replied : " A Junior, that's all."

He raised an eyebrow comically. " There you are. The lady says you only want a Junior. She knows, obviously."

They all three smiled and turned their backs. She heard Mr. Newbolt say : " Well, we won't bother."

The snub was all the more painful because Jane was well aware that it was deserved. She felt humiliated and angry for the rest of the day and avoided speaking to any of the three. Having done this successfully she felt sure they were avoiding her.

It was a relief when the production came to an end. She knew she had somehow got on the wrong side of the Unit. She looked forward to going into the Cutting Rooms to learn something new. She had never been there except for a few seconds while asking for a frame of film for matching purposes, and did not know any of the staff except by sight.

The first day after production when she walked in with Irene she dropped her script at the door.

" What did you do that for ? " demanded a very loud voice twice running. Then it groaned like a dying pig. There was a laugh.

" It's the loud speaker," explained Irene, smiling at Jane's puzzled face. " Come and be introduced."

There seemed to be two negative cutters, an Editor and

two assistants. They were all very friendly and shook Jane's hand. Jane immediately remarked that one of the assistants was rather attractive and distinctly like Greta Garbo. She was the only one of the four who used make-up and her name was Lila. She spoke in a tired voice with a lisp.

All round hung innumerable small strips of film, so that the room vaguely resembled a sale of celluloid belts. There were huge bins in every corner full of cuttings.

"What are those for?" asked Jane of the older girl, whose name was Edna.

"Those are for the cuts or trims—ends that are cut off. Officially. Unofficially we have other uses for them."

Lila giggled. Jane was interested. "Such as?"

"Dumping anyone who is too cheeky."

Jane gazed at the bins anxiously. "I should think they are very difficult to get out of."

"That's the idea," said Edna.

Irene had entered at once into conversation with Michael James, the Editor. He was a young man who looked far more like a soldier, with his small, neat moustache and his dapper features, than anyone to do with films.

"You're just the person I want," he said warmly, taking Irene's arm and guiding her into the adjoining room. "I'm worried about the exterior scene and want your advice. In my opinion the music doesn't fit, but I'm in two minds as to how to tackle the problem."

They went out, talking animatedly. Jane was impressed. The Editor was a very important person and that he should be asking Irene's advice on a matter touching his own department argued that she knew something about it. Jane hesitated, not knowing whether to follow or stay where she was; then Irene's head appeared round the doorway.

"Jane, come and listen to this scene on the moviola. You're interested in music."

Jane flushed with pleasure and followed her in. The room was smaller but contained the same type of machinery and

the inevitable strips of film. Irene and Mr. James were hanging over a small machine. Irene looked up.

"This is a moviola, Jane," she said. "You can run the positive through and get the effect it will produce on the screen. You see the actual frame is enlarged by a magnifying lens." She moved to let Jane look. "And at the same time the sound is reproduced by a loud speaker."

Jane saw that there were two strips of film threaded through the machine and guessed that one was picture and the other sound. The machine was switched on and run through. It was fascinating—just like a magic lantern show, and about as jerky. The music blared forth from the loud speaker.

When the scene had been run through and the machine switched off, Michael James said "Well?" and looked at Irene. She did not reply for a minute. Jane could not see what the query was. The music seemed suitable to the type of action and that was all there was to it.

"I must run through it again," said Irene.

"Right." The machine was switched on, the film having been rewound.

This time Jane sensed vaguely that there was something wrong, but what she could not tell.

"Yes, I think I see what you mean," said Irene at last, "but isn't it just a question of deciding your first salient point that *does* fit and moving the frames up or down accordingly?"

"Agreed," said Michael James promptly. "But our dear Musical Director has already decided which is the salient point, and I think he's wrong." He paused and added. "I don't feel like re-cutting the picture to suit *his* music."

"I don't think that should be necessary," said Irene. "But I'm interested to know what you consider *is* the salient point of the music?"

"The first big chord, naturally."

"What action does it come over?"

"The crowd running from the foreground. That is where

I cannot see eye to eye with Western. That is *not* the salient dramatic point of the scene."

"Well, why not get Western in and go through it with him? And please let me be in on the argument."

He grinned. "You shall. You always make up my mind for me, Irene. The trouble with me is I'm too lazy. I know when a thing's wrong but can't be bothered to get to the bottom of it. You're so conscientious. You'd make an admirable Editor."

"My dear Michael, you want something more than conscientiousness to be an Editor."

"For instance?"

"You're pulling my leg."

"I'm not. I want to know."

She smiled. "Well, artistic perception—a sense of rhythm, picture and drama."

He laughed. "My word! I'm in the wrong job."

They seemed great friends, Jane thought. Did everyone like Irene? Jane felt vaguely jealous, for she herself could not believe that there was anything so exceptional about her.

Irene turned to her briskly. "Well, Jane, you'll want to learn about these machines. If Mr. James doesn't object we'll run through some stuff on the moviola. It's a most useful machine. Then you can try your hand at it yourself."

The machine was foot-controlled, rather like a dictaphone. You touched the control and the film shot through the gate, depicting the action. You had to hold the reel on a pencil and let it unwind. After watching Irene two or three times, Jane tried her hand. She immediately dropped the reel and the film started to drag on the sprocket holes and was only just saved from snapping by Irene switching off. Jane went hot and cold and tried again. The next time she held the reel so tightly that it could not unwind. The film snapped.

"Oh, dear," said Irene, "Now we'll have to join it, or we'll get into trouble."

Jane watched the joining with interest. First the torn

frame was trimmed off and thrown away and in its place a black frame was put, the joining being done by overlapping and the application of film cement. It was an exact job. When it was done Irene wrote in red pencil the letters B.U.

"That means 'build up'" she explained to Jane, "so that the negative cutter knows a frame has been removed."

"If you didn't put that in, I suppose the picture would look jumpy?" asked Jane.

Irene shook her head. "No, a missing frame would not be noticed in a silent picture. It's because of matching the sound track—you'd throw it all out of sync at once."

"You seem awfully good at this," said Jane. "Do you like the work?"

Irene nodded. "Yes—better than Continuity. I want to do it some day."

Jane thought to herself that the job was much too finicky to please her. She would like to be something to do with the directing—perhaps a First Assistant. She had heard there were girls doing that job in the English studios.

Day after day Jane sat in the Cutting Rooms learning new things. She came more fully to understand the necessity for care in matching up and especially the necessity of having enough film to cut on. The cutters were moaning over the lack of overlap on the scenes shot by the temporary director called in when Mr. Newbolt was ill. They had a good laugh over Jane's story of the song in close-up, when Straker the Chief Cameraman, full of 'flu, had lit the wrong face.

"Darn good thing the scene was covered from a side angle," remarked Edna.

"That was *my* doing," said Jane. "I told Jim I thought something had gone wrong with the lighting."

There was a slight pause.

"That was good," said Irene, rather hastily, as if she wished to fill the silence.

Jane felt uncomfortable. Had she been showing off? They evidently thought so. She turned to the synchroniser and pretended deep interest in it.

"How can you tell if the sound track matches the picture, Edna, when the sound track is blank?"

Edna, her gloved hands hovering, started winding.

"There's a mark at the beginning of the sound, just the same as at the beginning of the picture. That's why a clapper board is used. The clap comes through on the sound track and is seen on the picture. That's your starting point. When you come to synchronising the rushes, you mark the clappers in red pencil, match these on the synchroniser, and then trim the fronts and ends off level. Carelessness results in a film being 'out of sync'."

"Oh," said Jane, "I've heard that happen in a movie."

Edna shook her head. "No, that would usually be carelessness in threading up the film in the projector. Dubbing, of course, is even more difficult."

"What's dubbing?"

"Fitting a sound track on to a picture that is already made—like when an English version is made of a foreign film."

"How is that done?"

"The actors speak their lines into a microphone while watching the lips of the actors in the picture. Then the cutters finish the job."

"Yes, it does sound difficult," agreed Jane.

Edna pulled off her gloves and rose. "Come on," she said, "morning tea."

She led the way to a small sitting-room which belonged exclusively to the Cutting Room staff, and immediately lit a cigarette, sank into a sofa and took out some knitting from a bag. The others did the same, except for the youngest whose name was Joan. She did not smoke. Jane accepted a cigarette from Lila, though she seldom smoked.

"I want my tea," said Lila.

"Where's that girl drat her?" asked Edna of no one in particular.

"I'm here," whined an indignant voice. An undersized

girl of about fourteen came in carrying a tray of tea things. She sniffed.

"Blow your nose," said Edna.

The apprentice, for such she was, sniffed again.

"Blow your nose," said Edna.

"Haven't got a handkerchief," replied the apprentice triumphantly.

The girl proceeded to pour out tea, punctuated by sniffs.

"Haven't you any knitting?" asked Lila of Jane.

"Me?" asked Jane, surprised, forgetting her grammar.

"Don't you knit?" asked Edna.

"Not much," confessed Jane. "I once knitted a pair of mittens, but they weren't, if you understand."

"How odd!" said Lila. Everyone laughed.

"I expect you don't like knitting," said Edna sagely.

"You've got to like things to do 'em well."

The apprentice looked round the door, having just exited, and asked if more hot water was required. On being told it was, she disappeared with a sniff.

"Has she got adenoids?" asked Jane.

"Has she not," replied Edna.

"What time will we be finishing to-night, Edna?" asked Lila.

"The M.D. wants the rough cut ready for Sunday. That means we'll have to work right up to 7.45 most evenings."

"I don't mind staying this evening," said Joan.

Edna's face was imperturbable. "If anyone stays it will be me and Lila. You're only a kid and have got farther to go home."

Joan flushed indignantly. "I'm not a kid."

"You are. Lila and I will work to-night. Her boy friend can take her out to dinner afterwards."

Jane looked at Lila with interest and wondered who he was. Lila blushed. "Shut up," she said through her cigarette smoke.

"When is the glad day, Lila?" demanded Rose, clacking her knitting needles busily.

"You're talking a lot of wot," said Lila confusedly.

"A lot of what?" asked Joan, mimicking.

"Oh, shut up."

Edna winked at Jane, as if to draw her into the conspiracy. "She'll turn up to work one day married—you see if she doesn't."

Jane found this idle chatter delightful. She enjoyed the morning and afternoon breaks for tea, but noticed that Irene never joined them. She never stopped for tea at all, but was always talking to Michael James about some cutting problem.

One day they were sitting over afternoon tea, chipping Lila as usual, when Edna suddenly said: "D'you remember what a pest John was during the days Mr. Newbolt was ill?"

They all nodded.

Jane felt herself colouring, but managed to keep the tell-tale blush in hand. "He was absolutely wonderful!" she said warmly. "That was when Irene was away ill and I was left to it. He kept me supplied with stills and cuttings from you people."

"He's always very kind," said Joan.

"He's vewy handsome," observed Lila.

"Yes," said Jane; and this time she blushed.

No one appeared to notice.

"Well," said Edna, "it's not difficult to guess why he did it."

The others smiled. Jane was horribly confused and became so scarlet that she was glad Lila dropped her ball of wool and she could crawl on the floor and retrieve it for her, hoping the redness of her face would thus be accounted for. Were they getting at her? They seemed quite innocent. She seated herself again and asked for a light for her cigarette.

As soon as she could she made an excuse to go and returned to the Cutting Rooms. Irene was there, as usual, with Michael James. Mr. Western, the Musical Director was with them. They were engaged in very earnest conversation.

Jane sat in the corner and picked up her script, but was

not listening to them. She was saying over and over to herself: "What did Edna mean? What could she mean? That John was helping me because I was the sort of girl he could fall for? Could she have meant that? What else?" She could find no other interpretation and was in a state of agitation and joy.

Gradually the conversation of the other three penetrated her thoughts and she grasped they were going over the same musical sequence that Irene and Michael James had discussed the first day she came into the Cutting Rooms. Michael James was speaking, trying to explain something to Mr. Western.

"Well, you see, Western, I could easily re-cut the picture to fit the music, but I don't particularly want to. That leaves me two alternatives—the first is make a cut in the music track which again, I don't want to do. After all you're satisfied the music is good and I don't want to muck it up."

"Glad to hear that," murmured Western.

James grinned and went on. "The third thing I could do is decide where *I* think the first big chord should come and move the picture up or down accordingly. Irene thinks I should do that. What I'm particularly interested in is why you chose the crowd scene for your chord?"

"No, it's I who am particularly interested," interposed Irene, "as I should probably have done the same myself."

Western produced the score of the music and laid it on a table. "This chord?" he asked, dabbing at it.

Michael James nodded.

Western scratched his ear pensively. "It seemed to me, dramatically speaking, that the apex of the drama was in the scene where the crowd, having heard there was a fire, is rushing from foreground of picture. Why, where would you put it?"

Michael turned to Irene. "Ladies first," he said politely.

Irene flushed a little and hesitated. "I—I can't help agreeing with Mr. Western," she said at last, "but I'm willing to be converted."

Michael sighed. "Why, here, of course!"

He switched on the moviola and ran a length of film through then stopped the machine suddenly.

The other two looked. Jane rose and slipped up behind them. She could just see it was a picture of an angry-looking sky.

"There!" Irene seemed surprised.

James went on to explain. "That's a cut to what they see. The sky lit with an angry glare. What does it mean to them? Fire! It is a shock. A chord. Got it? The chord placed over the following picture, when they are running towards the fire, is an anti-climax. Too late. D'you see what I mean?"

Western looked taken aback, then replied slowly; "I believe you're right. Then what are you going to do to make the rest of the music fit?"

"Easy, my dear chap—I shall have to cut a few frames of the picture after the chord and fade the music in a little later to allow the chord to come over my sky scene and the rest is O.K." He switched on the moviola and ran it a few feet before stopping it again. "See here, Irene, how well this fits—this close up of the old man listening—it comes over a rest in the music; then follow two semi-quavers indicating——" He ran the picture a little way and over the two brief notes were the sound of footsteps. He switched off. "See?"

Western was regarding Irene, pleased at having his music exhibited.

"Yes, I do see. It matches the action perfectly."

"You should read Eisenstein's *The Film Sense*," said Michael James. "It gives a fascinating description, with diagrams, of fitting music to picture and vice versa." He turned to Western. "I suppose you've read it?"

"Yes. Full of good stuff, though I must admit that personally I found a lot of the ideas on colour a bit deep. Did you see *Fantasia*?"

Michael James grimaced. "I did."

"You didn't like it?"

"It was a good idea, but it failed in the main."

"Oh, no," objected Irene. "I think the Bach Toccata and Fugue set to colour and line was thrilling."

"Well, perhaps."

"I'd have preferred the music alone," said Western. The two men grinned at each other.

"And I thought the introducing of the sound track as a personality was definitely charming," insisted Irene.

"Oh, yes, that was——" They both seemed to agree.

"So did I," said Jane, without meaning to butt in.

The two men smiled at her and moved off together. Irene turned to Jane.

"Did you take all that in, Jane?"

"Some of it. I'm beginning to grasp the fact that there is an enormous amount of detail involved in the making of a film. I'm quite amazed."

"That's what makes it so fascinating."

"Want a job, Jane?" called Edna from the adjoining room.

Jane went through eagerly. "Yes?"

"Here's a reel wants re-winding." She passed over a reel that had been through the moviola.

Jane took it with some dismay. The rewinders were hand-operated but she had never used one. Very carefully she got the film off the spool and re-wound it without causing a break—nice and tight too, it seemed. She carried it triumphantly to Edna.

She was only a few paces away when the middle, more loosely wound than the rest, fell out. The celluloid streamed across the floor in crisp writhing corkscrews. Edna and Joan laughed unfeelingly. Jane did her best to tuck the middle back, but was so clumsy about it that Edna took it from her. In no time she had coiled it into position and twisted the spool until the whole thing was tight.

"How well you do it!" said Jane despairingly.

"Missed me vocation, I did;" said Edna, "ought to have been behind the ribbon counter."



In no time she had coiled it back into position and twisted the spool till the whole thing was tight

(facing p. 76)



The coming production was a small one and Jane found, to her intense disappointment, that she was not required as an assistant. Secretly she nursed a grudge that they had not given her a chance to do the Continuity by herself. It was a second and much greater blow when Mr. Stratton called her into the Production office and announced that his new secretary was no good and he wanted Jane back until he found another.

Jane was almost in tears. Irene tried to cheer her up, saying she would certainly be on the following production, which was a big one, but Jane, refusing to be cheered, remarked that Mr. Stratton might never find another secretary. In fact, Jane had a guilty feeling that she was herself to blame for this set-back. Hadn't she got rather swelled-headed and behaved badly after returning to the production, with the idea that she had been so clever when left to carry on alone, that she knew everything? Even John seemed to have no time for her these days, though he came into the Cutting Rooms and spoke to Irene and the others occasionally. Once she was back in the Production office she would not see him at all. It was too bad. She was not, she thought, being fairly treated.

She told her father. He counselled patience. Everything comes to him who waits. . . .

Jane went back to office work and typing, the light gone from her face. February crawled by and her heart was as dull as the weather. Some of the Unit, especially Jim, came into the office quite often, but not John. He had no business there. Irene she saw frequently, but she was always in a hurry and preoccupied. Jane no longer lunched with the Unit, but watched them from the staff table with the other typists and clerks, hating it. The studio was now let to an outside company pending the preparation of the next production, and Irene went on holiday.

By the end of March Jane had become so depressed that she almost believed Mr. Stratton meant to keep her and not give her another chance in the studio. Had she irretrievably

ruined her chances as a Continuity girl by her behaviour? In a real effort to help herself she worked conscientiously, though bored to tears, and Mr. Stratton sometimes murmured in his vague manner, "good girl." It was her only reward.

One morning in April a girl came to be interviewed. Afterwards Mr. Stratton said to Jane: "I think she'll do, don't you?"

Jane, trying to be honest, replied that she thought she would.

"That will free you, Jane. You've been a good girl. Do you want to go back to Continuity?"

Jane's whole face lit up. He laughed.

"I see you do. Well, the next is a big production. I expect we'll need you."

Jane flew home that night and told her father. He stroked her hair and looked as pleased as she did. "I said you only had to be patient, my girl."

Her mother took a different view. "More late hours, I suppose," she commented. "Just when you'd been nice and early."

"Oh, mother, we never work late in the studio."

"Yes, but those 'rushes' and script conferences! They ought to pay you more."

"They will, when I've learnt the job."

"I thought you had by now."

"Well, nearly."

In her heart Jane agreed with her mother. She was sure she had very little more to learn about Continuity.

The next morning Mr. Stratton told her that production was scheduled to start on exteriors in two weeks' time. It was to be a naval picture with the full co-operation of the Senior Service. A Unit was to be sent to Portsmouth to photograph rehearsals for Navy Week. They were to be away two days and sleep one night in Portsmouth and one night on board. Jane was to go with them.

Jane, grasping the script he thrust into her hands and walking on air, left the office to study the exterior shots and

mark off exactly how many there were to be taken. After that there would be script conferences, schedules to draft and all the exciting preparation for a production.

She went straight into the Cutting Rooms where she knew she would find Irene.

"Irene," she called, "I'm going to Portsmouth with the Unit and joining you in the studio later. Isn't it thrilling?"

Irene smiled. "That's fine, Jane," she said.

Life was good again.

VI. ON LOCATION

A FORTNIGHT later Jane arrived in Portsmouth with the Unit. It was a glorious day in early May. The Director, Commander Hunter, was a retired naval man with some previous film experience and a way of handling men. The Unit were eager to work for him.

Two taxis took them and their apparatus to a lovely old Tudor inn standing on the main street near the docks. The hall, full of flowers and oak-panelled, had a mellow, homely look that pleased Jane. A room was assigned to her and she took her suitcase to it and hurried down again. They were to go on board H.M.S. *Condor* as soon as possible, as the rehearsal started at 2 p.m. and there was a great deal to arrange first.

The Commander called Jane aside, looking rather worried.

“Look here, Jane, have you got any trousers with you?”

Jane was puzzled. “No.”

“Do you think you could borrow a pair from one of the Unit? You see, I think there may be some difficulty in getting you aboard. It’s simply not done to take women on board one of His Majesty’s ships, even though I do know the Captain personally and have got a pass for Continuity.”

Jane’s heart fell. She didn’t want to be left out of this adventure. “But if you have a pass——”

He grinned. “No doubt the Admiralty were under the impression that Continuity was also a male, like the rest of the Unit, and I didn’t bother to disillusion them.”

“Oh, I see. I think it’s very unlikely any of the Unit will have brought an extra pair of trousers.” She pondered. “But couldn’t I buy a pair now—on the way to the docks?”

His face brightened. “That’s the idea.” He produced a couple of notes. “That enough?”

Jane took them. “Too much. I’ll get a bill, anyhow. Shall I go now?”

"No, we can wait for you in the taxi. Come with me."

The Unit bundled into two taxis as before. Jane got in with Commander Hunter, George and all the apparatus. The taxi stopped on instructions before a likely looking store and Jane went in. Ten minutes later she emerged in grey flannels. They were men's and too big, but not so bad. She climbed into the taxi, aware that the Commander was smiling and George, as usual, looking sardonic.

"I had to buy a belt," she explained to the Commander, "as they're a bit big round the waist. Here is the change and the bill."

He took the change. "Keep the bill and make out an expenses chit when you get back to the studio."

The taxi lurched forward.

"Ought I to tuck my hair behind my ears?" asked Jane anxiously.

The Commander laughed. "You could."

George chewed. "Can't think why we brought her," he said moodily. "Quite unnecessary."

Jane prickled with anger at being referred to as 'her', but said nothing.

"You'll enjoy it anyhow, won't you, Jane?" asked the Commander.

"Rather," agreed Jane, warming to him.

They arrived at the dock and found the destroyer, grey and trim, alongside the wharf. A gangway was down and they were evidently expected. In a moment a tall, uniformed officer was standing on deck awaiting them. Hunter hailed him and they all trooped up the gangway, Jane behind the Commander.

The Captain and Commander Hunter exchanged greetings, then the former's eye fell on Jane. He looked very taken aback and hastily drew Hunter aside. Hunter seemed to be explaining and then came up to Jane.

"Captain Wade is a little dubious about you, Jane, but I've persuaded him to let you stay on board. Keep as much on the starboard side as possible, as despite the Admiralty

pass, the Naval dock authorities might interfere if you are noticed."

The Commander was playing the lead in the film as well as directing it and he retired and reappeared in uniform. Jane checked up her script and made notes while George took various shots of the Commander walking up and down the deck, mounting the spiral ladder to the bridge, popping in and out of doorways and giving orders. She tried to remember to keep as much as possible out of sight of the dock, but it was not always convenient.

They had just taken the last shot before lunch when she noticed a group of shoddy-looking individuals standing on the dock. They had a camera with them and must, she thought, be a film Unit. Presumably they had come to cover the rehearsal, but had not apparently passes to come on board. Jane retired hastily, in case she should be identified as a woman.

A delightful cold lunch was served in a cabin reserved for the Unit. The Commander messed with the officers. Everyone agreed the Navy were grand hosts.

The rehearsal was timed for two o'clock. George was to go on board a motor boat and cruise round, taking all the interesting shots he could find, especially concentrating on the fight between the landing party and some pirates, which was the show piece and fitted in with the story to be shot in the studio. Jane asked him to keep note of the number of shots he used and to call them 'A' shots on his camera, so as not to confuse them with the shots the Commander was taking on board. He did not reply to her suggestion but eyed her in his usual infuriating way. She did not 'rise'. She knew she could trust him to be sensible, even if he had to be rude about it.

At about a quarter to two George was put on board the motor launch with his two assistants and equipment when Jane, who was leaning over the side watching this operation, was suddenly seized by the arm. It was the Commander and he seemed flustered.

"This way," he hissed.

He piloted her into a doorway and downstairs. By their cabin a Marine sergeant waited, red-faced and wooden.

"You're to take this young lady round the ship, as ordered by the Captain," said the Commander.

He touched his cap, standing to attention. "Yessir. This way, Miss."

"The authorities are on board," whispered the Commander, grinning. "Keep close to the sergeant."

Jane was thrilled. This was adventure! Then she felt a little frightened. Supposing she was turned off the ship! She followed the sergeant nervously as he marched down a corridor and descended more steps. The air was getting warmer. At the top of a companionway he stopped and turned towards her, avoiding her eyes.

"You'd like to see the engine-room, I expect, Miss?"

Jane realised at once that this was where she was to hide.

"Oh, yes, please!" she said, smiling.

The sergeant seemed to get a bit redder about the cheeks, turned abruptly and descended.

They were in the engine-room. There seemed to be no one about. The sergeant took her solemnly round and explained ponderously the names of the various machines. Turbines and diesel engines and electric chronometers meant very little to Jane, but she listened as if spellbound and said "Yes?" and "Oh?" and "No, really?" to everything. At last they reached the companionway again. The sergeant ascended briskly and waited at the top to help Jane.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss," he said, having hauled her to her feet with a grip she felt sure would leave a bruise, "I'll just see if—you're wanted."

"Thank you," said Jane. And smiled again.

As he turned away the back of his neck was so red she felt sure he was blushing. She had great difficulty in restraining a smile when he returned with a message from the Commander to say she could come up on deck. He was so extremely solemn and ill at ease.

She emerged cautiously on the starboard side. Jim was there and grinned at her.

"Been flirting with the sergeant?" he asked.

"Rather," said Jane. "What happened?"

"It was as good as a play. Those News Reel men you saw were so jealous at not being allowed on board that they went and made a complaint to the dock authorities about our having dressed-up actors and actresses on board. They interviewed the Captain, who introduced Commander Hunter and pointed out he was wearing his own uniform. They couldn't say anything to *that*. Then those of us on board were introduced and our various jobs explained. Then they said a woman had been seen on board. Where was she? Everyone looked blank and the Captain suggested it was one of the crew dressed ready for his part as a 'pirate' in the show. But they wouldn't have that—a woman in trousers, they said, with long wavy hair. The Commander suddenly said with the most innocent air in the world: "Of course, he means The Boy—he has rather long and beautiful hair, only don't tell him I said so"—and everyone laughed. He explained that The Boy was now out on the launch with the camera crew. Everyone slapped each other on the back and the authorities departed." He chuckled to himself. "I must say Hunter was great. The Captain was like a cat on hot bricks and nearly gave the show away."

"Oh, I wish I'd been there," lamented Jane. "It was so dull in the engine-room."

"Tell that to the marines," retorted Jim.

A little late, the rehearsal started. Commander Hunter ran down the gangway and boarded a picket boat. This was for the benefit of George's camera, operating from close by. He then ran up again, was replaced by the Second Assistant, similarly dressed, who got into the picket boat to 'double' for him. Commander Hunter seized his camera and took a shot as the picket boat moved off, supposedly for a hostile shore.

There was a pause while the boat neared the shore. Out

shot two boatloads of 'pirates', armed to the teeth and with a bright collection of handkerchiefs tied round their heads.

Jane, realising that she was supposed to be watching the Commander take pictures, flew after him up the companion-way. She was just in time to note what he was taking, the picket boat turning for the ship, returning the fire of the pirates.

Then everything started to happen at once. Bells went, flags and pennants started moving. Guns were loaded. Men flew up and down companionways.

Had the authorities been on board they would have been treated to the sight of a Commander tearing madly from side to side of the ship, taking shots with a small hand camera and finally lying down flat on his back to photograph the flags being hoisted. Jane noted that this was a 'panning' (moving) shot, already somewhat trembling before a midshipman, intent on getting somewhere, tripped over the Commander's legs. He swore.

Glancing to starboard, Jane saw George's launch making figures of S round the three boats, who were now engaged in a kind of running and ramming competition with oars as weapons.

No sooner had she seen this than she caught sight of the Commander tearing up to the gun turret. She followed. One round had already been fired. It had made her jump. Just as she reached the turret, the second round went off. Jane dropped her script and clapped her hands over her ears. Another round went off. And another. And another. Jane tucked her head into her shoulders and ground her teeth in pain. She did not care if she missed a thousand shots, she couldn't stand that noise.

When she opened her eyes finally she saw two grinning Marines regarding her.

"What's the matter, Miss?"

Jane tried to speak, but was interrupted by another round. She tried again.

"The noise!"

They grinned more widely. "Why, that's nothing, Miss. We're firing blanks."

Jane stared at them in horror. Blanks. What could the real thing be like? Before she could conjecture, a dirty piece of cotton waste was thrust at her.

"Put a bit in your ears, Miss."

Jane shook her head politely. The firing was now more intermittent. She looked cautiously over the gun turret.

Down below, near the gangway from which the picket boat had departed, a most realistic hand to hand fight was going on. Sailors were falling into the water right and left and being cheerily hauled in on ropes by their friends on board. Jane saw Commander Hunter arrive on the lower deck and lean over to get a good shot. She heard a faint shout. It was George, gesticulating wildly from the launch. From her vantage point Jane saw at once that the Commander was in George's picture. She cupped her hands and yelled out :

"Commander Hunter ! You're in George's picture !"

He looked up, frowning.

"You're in George's picture !"

He dropped down on deck as if shot. But George continued to make wild, sweeping gestures. He was literally dancing with rage. Jane then saw that the News Reel Unit were circling round in a boat and must be in the background. She yelled again.

"Commander Hunter ! The News Reel men are in George's picture !"

He leapt to his feet, his face furious, his lips moving. Jane felt glad she was out of earshot. He leaned over the side and in a most unexpectedly powerful voice yelled : "You men down there—get out of the way !"

The News Reel Unit looked unspeakable things. But they moved out of the way. The Commander dropped out of sight again. So did Jane. She felt it would be too bad if her curly head appeared over the gun turret of one of His Majesty's destroyers.

When she again cautiously peered over the edge, the launch was chugging away to get a longer view. It turned sharply. Jane gasped. The camera, which was on a tripod, stood on one leg like a ballet dancer. George grabbed at it and fell against the low rail of the boat. As it righted, he righted. Jane breathed again. It had been a near thing. The day's work had almost gone to the bottom of the harbour.

In a few minutes the show was over. The picket party came aboard, slightly dishevelled. George followed from the launch, clutching his precious camera. He looked very pale.

"Got some good stuff?" enquired the Commander anxiously as he met him at the top of the gangway.

"I think so, sir," replied George. He turned uncertainly away, then thrust the camera at Jim. "Excuse me." He rushed to the side.

Jane turned away tactfully, but absolutely delighted. George, the scorner of women, was seasick. Serve him right! Then she saw his ghastly face and felt sorry for him.

"I'll get you some water," she said. And rushed inside to the cabin where their things were. She returned with a mug of water which he took in silence.

When he handed it back to her, he almost smiled.

As they left the ship Jane saw a row of grinning Marines lining the upper deck. Feeling gay she waved to them and then jumped into the waiting taxi.

After tea there was a conference. They were to take shots of H.M.S. *Condor* leaving harbour and other 'atmospheric' shots of the dock next morning, and in the afternoon would be taken out to the destroyer, which would be lying at anchor waiting for them outside the harbour. They were to spend that night on board in order to take some shots of dawn at sea. Nothing was said to Jane about her coming on board and she had a panicky feeling she was going to be left at the hotel.

When the conference had broken up she followed the Commander out and said, "Commander Hunter, what about me?"

He gave her an indulgent smile. "Well, what about you?"

"Will I—I mean, can I go on board?"

"Do you want to?" He fixed his twinkling blue eyes on her.

Jane drew a deep breath and let it out on a sigh. "Oh, yes, please!"

"I think that'll be all right, Jane."

She flushed with pleasure and hugged her script, since, although he was old enough to be her father, she couldn't very well hug him.

Someone touched her arm as she turned away. It was George, looking rather better, but in some way different. He seemed to have difficulty in finding words and gargled helplessly in his throat as he shifted his chewing gum rapidly from one side of his mouth to the other. Jane watched him in growing amazement. He was shy! The discovery intrigued her immensely. She felt frightfully superior.

"Yes, George?"

"I—Jim told me—er—thank you for getting the Commander and the News Reel lot out of my camera. We would have lost a good shot, if they hadn't been told." He paused and then added in a mere mutter, "And for the water."

Jane kept her face as blank as possible. It was a wonderful chance to get back at him. It was on the tip of her tongue to say "Don't imagine I did it for *you*!" But instead, she found herself saying mildly: "Oh, that's all right," and turning away in as much confusion as he was.

Furious with herself, she walked upstairs to her room, sat on the narrow bed, and drummed her heels on the floor. Why was it he made her behave so awkwardly? She disliked the man. He was self-sufficient, conceited, unmannerly and without humour. The exact opposite to John, who was so polite and charming, who always said and did the right thing and was considerate and understanding. For some reason the comparison brought tears to her eyes; she could

not quite fathom why. But she felt suddenly that she was very much alone and wanted someone to look after her. Someone like her father . . . someone like John.

She went to bed early after dinner in the charming oak-panelled dining-room. The feeling of loneliness lingered, for she was one girl among a lot of men who had no particular interest in her.

It was only when she got into bed and relaxed, aware of a delicious tiredness, that she realised she had been up since half-past six that morning and had a busy and exciting day. Now for a long, lovely sleep.

It was very close, so she had left the window open. Her thoughts kept her preoccupied for some minutes and she was just drowsing off when she became aware of a loud noise of bells, rattling and jarring. It was a tram.

She recollected that the inn was on the narrow main street and that the pavement was only about three feet wide. There was a tram halt almost outside the inn and points just beyond. From that moment the stopping, starting, jarring over points, bells, voices and roar of machinery were kept up till about one o'clock in the morning.

By that time Jane was in a state of nervous tension and almost groaned aloud in anticipation of the bell that would start the ghastly cacophony again. At last, all was comparative quiet.

She must have sunk into an uneasy slumber when a lorry, seemingly larger and heavier than any lorry had any right to be, rumbled by, shaking the whole building. Jane sighed and turned over. A few moments later another lorry passed. She woke and gritted her teeth.

About an hour later she realised that she might as well face the fact that this was the main road from the docks and lorries would continue to pass like roaring monsters until the trams started again.

She was right.

Jane went down to breakfast hoping she did not look as awful as she felt. At table she mentioned her bad night.

No one was sympathetic until Commander Hunter came down, caught a few words at the tail end of her complaint and solemnly held out his hand.

"Shake," he said. "Never have I heard such traffic!"

They shook hands solemnly, much to Jane's delight. He was the only other member of the Unit who had a room at the front of the inn. Over breakfast Jane found out all about his family, a girl and a boy, and was soon herself telling him about her own father. However, when she realised the Unit were listening she dried up.

Soon they were getting their apparatus together and were off to the docks in taxis.

The morning passed quickly getting various shots on the dock and about noon H.M.S. *Condor* made ready to put out to sea. The Second Assistant had been put on board to 'double' once more for the Commander as the ship left the dock. The Commander wished to stay on shore to supervise the shots to be taken.

Jane was fascinated as she watched the manœuvring of the trim destroyer as she slowly got under way. The Marines were lining the upper deck at attention. The Second Assistant and the Captain of the ship stood at the head of the gangway as it was hauled up and saluted. The pennants went up. Slowly, gracefully she moved away, smoke pouring from her funnel, causing a stir over the quiet waters that set small boats bobbing as if they were curtsying to a passing royalty.

They waited for some minutes and took another shot at mid-distance; then, after a longer wait, another shot when the destroyer was steaming fast out of the harbour; and finally one when she was only an indistinct shape on the water.

The Commander went and spoke to the picket boat crew who were to wait for the Unit and take them out to the destroyer later. Then they packed up and went back to the hotel for lunch.

There was an hour to kill after the meal and the Com



The morning passed quite quickly getting various shots on the dock

(facing p. 90)



mander advised Jane to have a rest as they would be up at dawn the next morning. She went to her room and lay down but was far too excited to rest. The idea of sleeping aboard was thrilling. Mary was already mad with envy and she must be sure to bring back a wealth of detail. How she would delight in the story of her sister being 'hunted' by the dock authorities! She must embroider it a bit and Mary would add a bit more and would have a great success at school, re-telling it.

The picket boat was waiting for them when they got down to the dock about three o'clock. Jane was helped on board by a midshipman—a dashing young fellow with fair, crinkly hair and Irish eyes, very expert, she thought, at assisting ladies. She sat down in a corner, near the cabin, and watched the others come aboard—George, looking far from happy, then the rest of them, and finally the Commander. The midshipman saluted.

"Getting a bit choppy, sir."

"Good. Just what we want for pictures."

Jane glanced slyly at George. He looked even more unhappy. She turned away, hiding a smile.

The engine was started up and they moved off, bobbing and bowing gently. Soon they were going at a fair pace. The Commander was standing up against the cabin beside the midshipman, looking forward. Jane decided she would like the wind in her face and got up and stood near them. The midshipman at once turned to her, showing his white teeth in a smile.

"You like the sea?"

"Yes."

He gave her a rapid appraisal and turned politely again to the Commander.

The wind was strong and blew her hair back, whipping a stray curl on her forehead. She breathed deeply of the damp, salt air, loving the smell of the sea. Far ahead she could make out the destroyer. Under her feet the little craft seemed to strain and swell like a large fish arching its

backbone. Then she caught sight of George, huddled bleakly over his apparatus and felt sorry for him. How rotten to be seasick ! She had never experienced it.

Nearer and nearer came the destroyer until she loomed over them, her grey side seeming a sheer mountain as they bobbed under her. A ladder was swiftly lowered. The midshipman was up it like a monkey. Jane followed, starting off with a will ; but it wasn't easy and the swaying put her off. She pulled at the hand-rails manfully and was just beginning to feel she would never reach the top when she was grasped by a strong hand. A voice said : " That's it, Miss—nicely." And she found herself lifted up by the Marine sergeant. Behind him she caught sight of the grinning faces of a couple of his mates. Then she was on deck and looking back excitedly to see how the others were doing.

Tea was ready in the same cabin they had used before. It was a jolly meal, with the Marine sergeant presiding. Jim was inclined to make *sotto voce* remarks to Jane about her ' conquest '. The Boy was in high spirits and pretended to be heart-broken that his ' girl ' (meaning Jane) had been taken from him by a Marine. He made fearful faces behind the sergeant's back and whetted his table-knife, making lunges at his unsuspecting person. The Unit were convulsed. It was fun. Only George did not seem amused. ' Wet blanket ! ' thought Jane.

A few shots of sunset at sea were taken later and the evening was whiled away with a game of poker. Jane did not take part for she did not know how to play, but she backed The Boy and became increasingly delighted as he won, gave him endless advice which he never took, and thoroughly enjoyed herself. He won five shillings and was flushed and triumphant.

At ten o'clock the Commander, looking pink and pleased with himself, appeared and sent them all off to sleep, with orders to be on deck at 5.30 ack emma. They would be called by a Marine at 5 ack emma.

He then led Jane to her cabin himself. She was amazed

at the compactness and comfort of it. There was even a wash basin. He laughed at her appreciation.

"It's the Wireless Operator's cabin—he's given it up to you."

"Oh, how sweet of him!" cried Jane. "Please thank him."

"You can do that yourself to-morrow;" said the Commander, "he'll like that." Smiling, he went out.

Jane slept like a top and it seemed no time before there was a persistent knocking that at first was part of her dream, and then became reality. She called out: "Yes?"

A voice, she thought it was that of the Marine sergeant, called out: "Five o'clock, Miss, and your hot water. I'll leave it outside the door."

"Thank you," called Jane, leaping out of bed and struggling into a dressing-gown.

"Would you like a cup of tea later?" came the same voice.

"Yes, please."

"Very good, Miss. In about ten minutes."

Footsteps died away. Jane smiled to herself at the tact of mentioning when the tea would arrive. She could be dressed by then.

As she got ready she became aware of the vibration of the ship—it seemed alive, breathing. No wonder sailors referred to ships as 'she'. There was something human about them—perhaps because they were almost part of the sea, which was alive.

At 5.30 sharp Jane was ready. The Commander himself came to fetch her, looking spruce and alert. They went up on deck together. It was only just beginning to be light. George was there, busy setting up his camera. All wore overcoats for it was quite cold and misty. The Commander was pleased—he had wanted a mist.

There was really nothing for Jane to do. She knew how many shots were wanted and only waited to make notes as each shot was taken. They took one extra one.

Most of the time she stood near the rail looking alternately down at the sucking, dark waters as they whirled past, seeming to snatch at the ship with white fingers out of the dark depths, or up at the sky covered with speeding clouds, now grey and, to the East, faintly luminous. The wind was in her face and the sound of the sea and the thrum of the engines in her ears. In the half light there was a sensation of speed quite different from that of the daytime. The ship literally seemed to be flying, hardly touching the water, straight towards the sunrise, leaving the dark night behind. It was terrific, exhilarating. It made her feel detached but not lonely, because she was part of the whole thing, the movement, the life, the going forward. She must try to describe the feeling to her father. He would understand.

The exhilaration stayed with her. By mid-morning they were back in harbour. Jane shook hands with the Marine sergeant before leaving and was introduced to the Wireless Officer. She thanked him for his kindness in giving up his cabin. He was so nice that she was confirmed in her impression that the Navy has the most charming and efficient men you can meet anywhere.

VII. THE TALENT COMPETITION

THE naval picture was finished and everyone predicted it would be a success. The Commander had been popular, the sets were good—for the battleship deck scene a band from the Marines had arrived and entertained the studio for a couple of days—and the rough-cut was said to be splendid.

Having, as it were, started the production by going with the Unit on exterior work, Jane felt a personal interest in it and had, she thought, been able to help quite a lot. Irene was quiet and rather preoccupied. Jane sometimes wondered if she was worried about something and once or twice tried to draw her out, but with no success. Irene was the sort of person who never said anything at all about herself. Jane, while continuing to admire her, was sometimes exasperated by her extreme reticence. She had brightened up only when the production was finished and she went into the Cutting Room. Jane wondered if working with Michael James had anything to do with it.

About this time a film depicting the beauty of the English countryside was in preparation and Jane was transferred to the script. They were to photograph the local Agricultural Show for the purposes of the film and Mr. MacPherson had the brilliant idea of organising a Talent Spotting competition, to be judged by the leading artistes themselves—The prize was to be a film test. Jane was the very first to hear of it, for she was busy taking down script when Mr. MacPherson burst in with this great idea. On the spot she had to take down a suggested advertisement announcing the event in the local papers.

Jane was thrilled. A film test ! Some lucky girl would get a film test ! If only she—but of course studio personnel could not compete. She finished her notes and ran to the Cutting Rooms, arriving so flushed and breathless that the girls all stopped work and looked up in wonder.

"Got a rise?" asked Edna imperturbably.

"No. News." She rushed across to the adjoining room and pushing open the door called: "Listen, Irene——"

She stood between the two rooms looking from one to the other and told them.

"A film test?" echoed Lila, interested.

"Nerts," said Edna.

"But what a chance!" gasped Jane on an expiring breath.

"You look as if you'd like the chance yourself," commented Edna. "Come on it."

"Don't you think it's on the level?" asked young Joan.

"Of course not. Just a stunt."

Jane's face fell. She looked towards Irene. "What do you think, Irene?"

Irene smiled. "I agree with Edna," she said. "It's only for advertisement. There's one chance in a million they'd find anyone worth bothering about."

"Oh, I see." She brightened. "Well, anyhow I shall have some fun. I'm going to act as secretary to Gloria June, who is judging the men."

"Yes, that *will* be rather fun," said Irene. "When is it to be? The same day that we take shots?"

"Yes. Now I must go and get the notice ready for the local paper. I'll show it to you all when I've typed it out." She departed, more soberly than she had come.

Jane was not free again until the lunch hour when she went in search of the Cutting Room girls. She found them, as she hoped, having sandwiches down by the stream at the end of the garden. They had a special place where they always went in hot weather, under a weeping willow where they could, if they wished, take off their shoes and stockings and trail their feet in the water. They were indulging in this favourite occupation when Jane arrived, Edna, as usual, knitting and with the inevitable cigarette hanging from her lower lip; Lila lazily lying and Joan munching sandwiches. The fourth girl, by the name of Susan, who

worked with Joan, always went home to lunch as she lived near by.

Jane sat down and handed over a copy of the advertisement. It was read in critical silence, passing from one to the other. Jane received it again.

"Good blurb," commented Edna.

Jane produced some chocolate and started to nibble it, leaning back against the bole of the tree. She had already had her lunch at the café.

"Gweedy pig," said Lila, moving her golden head slightly to squint at Jane.

Jane promptly broke off a piece and offered it to her. Edna and Joan started an argument on a certain complicated stitch in knitting. It was Greek to Jane so she closed her eyes and relaxed. Their voices sank into the background and the voices of the garden became audible. There was a bee humming; a fat, comfortable hum. She thought it must be a happy bee, full of honey—just as full as she was of lunch. She caught the faint whisper of the leaves and the grass as little breezes brushed through them. Then, far off, somewhere up in the sky, a thrush sang madly, joyously, sending a tingle down her spine.

"I believe she's asleep," said Edna's voice.

"I'm not!" Jane opened her eyes to prove it. The thought of Irene flashed into her mind and stayed, insistently. She said: "I say, Edna, have you noticed how quiet Irene has been lately? She was odd in the studio, too. Is she worried about something? Or ill, d'you think?"

Edna shook her head, busily counting stitches.

"I've tried to find out, but she's like an oyster, you know, I wonder—d'you think it has anything to do with Michael James?"

All three looked towards Jane. Then Edna shook her head again. "You're barking up the wrong tree," she said. And no further question of Jane's could elicit another word of explanation. In the end Jane gave it up and supposed

there must be some love affair in Irene's private life of which she knew nothing. She felt interested and sorry for her. Evidently she was not too happy.

A week later, at home, Jane was in fevered consultation with her mother and sister over what to wear at the Show the following day.

Irene was doing the Continuity on the shots, so Jane was quite free to enjoy herself until the time arranged for the Talent Competition, 3 p.m. She was very excited and so was Mary, for she was coming with Mrs. Weldon to see the fun. Jane was just as anxious that her family should look their best as she was to shine herself, so that the entire summer wardrobe of the Weldon females had been laid out to make a choice.

Jane decided for herself quickly. She was going to wear her peach linen frock and wide-brimmed white straw hat. But the hat must have its new ribbon sewn on and Mrs. Weldon set to work at once. She would wear no stockings, of course, and her white sandals. Mary was the problem. She flatly refused to wear any of her own frocks, which she declared were too 'babyish' for words. She was almost as tall as Jane, she said, and was going (with a stamp of her foot) to wear one of her frocks. Mrs. Weldon was against this but Jane, rather agreeing with Mary, persuaded her mother that with just a little alteration, her last summer's chintz frock would do beautifully for Mary. Mary's pout disappeared and she was all smiles. She stood patiently while being pinned up and, when free, danced madly all over the room. No hat for her, but a green bow in her fair hair to match the green in the pattern. Her sandals were horribly old, but if they were well polished she supposed they would do.

For the fiftieth time Jane bewailed the fact that her father worked on his newspaper on Saturdays. It was the only thing that spoiled her joy at the coming event.

The next morning was brilliant and airless. It was going to be hot. Jane, dressed in her peach linen, but carrying

her white hat and white sandals to keep them clean, went off at the usual time to the studio, with last minute instructions to her mother and Mary as to what time and where to meet her at the Show. Her father kissed her good-bye, his eyes twinkling. "You look simply scrumptious, my daughter," he said, and Jane went off smiling happily.

She rushed through her script work that morning, had an early lunch and together with the rest of the Unit was driven to the Show grounds before 2 p.m. By this time it was really scorching. Everyone was gasping for air but Jane, cool in her linen frock and sandals. She loved the sun and was thoroughly at ease. Many people turned to look at her with her golden-brown skin glowing under her white hat and the peach pink of her frock setting off her flushed cheeks and shining grey eyes. Jim had looked her up and down and in his tight, thin-lipped way, approved of her frock. The Boy had done his usual act of going faint with her 'overpowering beauty', and she even caught George eyeing her surreptitiously when he thought she was not looking. She felt very, very pleased with herself.

Punctually at two her mother and sister were at the appointed spot, Mary looking very excited and pretty, and even her mother was unusually flushed and animated. Jane led them to the ring where the sheep dog trials were to take place, as she knew the Unit would be there photographing and particularly wanted to introduce her family to Irene.

They found a good vantage point against the ropes and Mary looked this way and that, asking who was that, and that, and that until Jane, trying to find Irene, told her to shut up.

"Where's John Lang?" hissed Mary in her ear, not to be quietened.

"Oh, I don't think he's with the Unit," said Jane, looking across the ring and at once saw that he was there,

talking to Irene. "Oh, yes, he is—over there with Irene. I'll slip over and ask her to come and meet you both."

She walked round the ropes, her chin up, savouring the glances thrown at her. And then John saw her. He turned away from Irene, his eyes brightening.

"Well, it's Jane! Or is it?"

She ignored him as coolly as possible and went up to Irene. "Would you come and meet my mother and sister, please, Irene?"

"Of course, Jane. Where are they?"

"Just a moment," said John. "I really can't bear to let this vision slip from my sight so soon." He gazed at her critically. "Yes, exactly the right shade. Very effective. Jane, you'll be putting Gloria's nose out of joint."

Irene laughed and took Jane's arm. "He's very facetious this afternoon. Take no notice of him."

Jane, smiling, her heart thumping, walked away with her. She hoped John was watching her. There had been no doubt of his admiration. The day was made for her.

Irene stayed talking to Mrs. Weldon for a few moments. Jane could see her mother approved of her at once and was glad.

"I must go," said Irene suddenly. "The trials are just about to start and we are photographing." She shook hands with Mrs. Weldon. "Jane is looking lovely," she said frankly. "John Lang, our Stills Photographer, says she will be putting our leading lady's nose out of joint."

As she disappeared in the crowd Mary tugged at Jane's sleeve. "Did you hear that?" she whispered.

Jane made a face at her and then they turned to watch the trials.

The dogs, with tongues hanging out, looked too hot to be happy, but as soon as the whistles sounded they were off like lightning, turning, doubling, rounding up, barking at stray sheep and finally trotting after their particular flock with ears up and a proud look as much as to say "There you are!" until they were safely penned.

Each dog was judged on time. The winner was to star in the picture, so the owners, on this occasion, were even keener than usual for their dogs to win.

By the time the trials were over and the Unit ready to go and photograph the prize cattle and horse-jumping, Jane found it was three o'clock and she ought to be at the Competition tent. She went off in search of Gloria June, the actress, leaving her mother and Mary to amuse themselves.

On her way she met the Publicity Manager, a young fellow she did not know very well, for his office was in London. He seized her arm and piloted her towards the tent.

"Gloria is in a foul temper," he said rapidly, using his long, restless hands descriptively. "Says she's too hot and doesn't feel well—and I must admit that tent is like an oven—so I think you'll have to fire off the questions. They're on a printed sheet of paper, so it's quite easy."

"Oh, certainly," said Jane, rather pleased to have something definite to do.

It certainly was hot inside the tent. Gloria sat at a trestle table, her full mouth discontented, her smart black clothes looking too ridiculously 'West End' for words in her present surroundings, her small feet thrust into patent leather shoes with Spanish heels. No taste, thought Jane. The Publicity Manager introduced Jane and Gloria sulkily indicated a chair next to her and with a petulant movement pushed over the pile of papers and a pencil to Jane.

"You can do the talking and make the notes. I'll just look at the fools and tell you what I think of them after. It'll be unprintable."

Jane smiled discreetly. "I expect it's rather a bore for you, Miss June."

The Publicity Manager winked at Jane and she thought she heard him say "Atta-girl," under his breath. He went out.

There was a pause while Miss June made up her already heavily made-up mouth. Jane scanned the questions. Her eyes widened as she came on one of them which read :

Are your teeth your own? She pointed it out to Gloria and asked if she really had to ask that one.

"Of course," said Miss June. "The dashing young village Romeos nearly always have false teeth, because they never look after them when they're kids."

The first entrant arrived. He was large, ham-handed and definitely country bred—probably the butcher's assistant, Jane thought. She solemnly read out the questions. He had his own teeth. The final question was: Do you know anything you can recite?

When this was posed, he went off without a moment's hesitation into "The Charge of the Light Brigade", and had to be stopped after the first verse. Gloria said clearly: "Thank you. That will do. Next please."

He went out, wiping his hands on his thighs. At least, thought Jane, Gloria can get rid of them.

The next was a very old man who spoke in a falsetto voice. He said he was a comedian. When it came to the question about his teeth he cackled with laughter and said: "Nope. They're all false—and that's one of my tricks."

Whereupon the most terrifying convulsion of his face took place and he opened his mouth to display bare gums.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jane, half rising in horror. "You've swallowed them. Shall I send for a doctor?"

Another appalling convulsion took place and he grinned widely. The teeth were in place. Jane sank back, feeling rather hot. Gloria June was roaring with laughter.

"Darn good," she said. "Thank you Mr.—er—"

"Eaves is the name, Madam," he said, bowed and went out.

"Mark him up as a possible," said Miss June. Jane did so obediently, but privately considered Mr. Eaves merely revolting.

They came one after the other, mostly middle-aged, slightly bald on top and slightly gone under the chin, but sure they were the answer to the Maiden's Prayer. One of

them startled them both by bursting into a soulful tenor rendering of "You Are My Heart's Delight," when asked if he could recite. He was off key and not recommended. The heat was awful.

At last a young and quite good-looking boy came in with fair, wavy hair. He eyed Jane a lot; answered all her questions, then recited a few lines in a pleasant voice. While Jane paused, waiting for Gloria to send him away, he suddenly thrust an autograph book in front of her.

"Could I have your signature please, Miss June?" he asked Jane with a flash of white teeth.

Jane was confused. She pushed the book towards Gloria. "This is Miss June."

His face fell. "Oh, we all thought——". He pulled himself up, smiled at Gloria. "Would you be so kind?"

Gloria signed and shoved the book over. "Next please," she said curtly.

When he had gone, Jane's pencil hovered over the 'Remarks' column and she looked enquiringly at the actress, who was obviously annoyed.

"What shall I put, Miss June?"

"Oh, no good. He was bandy."

Jane bit her lip. It was not true.

"Go and get Mr. Vernon," said Gloria suddenly, snatching up the papers and notes. "I'm fed up with this. Time it was closed."

Jane rose and went out hurriedly in search of the Publicity Manager. She walked straight into a group of men, some of whom she had seen in the tent. They all besieged her, asking whether she thought they had a chance? Was she an actress?

"No, no, I'm only the secretary," she said, trying vainly to pass them, "and I know nothing about your chances." She saw Mr. Vernon at a distance and hailed him. "Mr. Vernon! Oh, Mr. Vernon!"

He turned and came to her, grinning. The men made way for him.

" Mr. Vernon, Miss June wants the Competition closed."

" I'll go in and see her."

He went in and Jane lingered outside, looking for her mother and Mary. A little way off the other tent, in which the ladies were being interviewed, was still surrounded with women, some standing in a queue ready to go in. Someone came out and Jane gasped with surprise as she recognised Mary. The little devil! Where was her mother? No sign of her.

Mr. Vernon came out piloting Gloria June through the crowd. Jane thought she had better wait for him and in a minute he returned, closed the flap of the tent and hung up a card which read: 'Competition closed.' There was a murmur of disappointment. Mr. Vernon grinned at the crowd, waving his hands; "Sorry, boys!"

He took Jane's arm and hurried her off, casting sly glances at her.

"Gloria is simply livid," he said, "at you being mistaken for the famous film star. Blames me, of course. I ought to have supplied exact description of her with photographs all round the tent. How was I to know she'd have such a stunning assistant? Half the Show has mistaken you for the star."

Jane smiled sceptically. She guessed most of this was a 'line' he was used to pulling. She saw her mother and, excusing herself, pushed her way through the crowd and reached her.

"Mother, have you seen Mary?"

Mrs. Weldon looked worried. "No—she disappeared over half an hour ago."

"Well, I have. Come over here. She's been in for the competition."

"What competition?" asked Mrs. Weldon, alarmed.

"No, not the horse-jumping, mother," laughed Jane, "the Talent competition."

Mrs. Weldon looked vexed. "Oh, the wicked girl!"

Jane was still laughing. "Shouldn't be surprised if she

gets a test—but—” hastily, “—it won’t lead to anything, so don’t worry.”

“I should hope not,” replied her mother firmly. “I’m not going to have my youngest made into one of those film stars. I saw Gloria June just now—nasty made-up looking creature!”

“She’s livid because some of them thought I was she.”

“Pity some of them don’t look more like you, dear,” said Mrs. Weldon with feeling.

From her mother this was a great compliment and Jane was impressed.

They found Mary on the edge of the crowd round the Competition tent. She turned to them joyously when they called, saying: “I’ve been in! I’ve been in—and I think I was good. He’s awfully nice, Mr. Chalmers the actor, isn’t he? He said I was a good girl when I recited one of Puck’s speeches—you know I’ve just learnt the whole part for the play at school.”

Neither of them had the heart to be cross with her as she chattered on. They went in search of refreshments.

They were just leaving the refreshment tent to find their way to the jumping Gymkhana when Mr. MacPherson himself barred their way. Behind him was Mr. Vernon, grinning.

“Introduce me, Jane,” said Mr. MacPherson expansively, waving his cigar.

Flustered, Jane said hurriedly: “Oh, Mother, this is Mr. MacPherson, our Managing Director—and my sister, Mary, Mr. MacPherson.”

He shook hands with them both, his manner patronising.

“You’ve two charming daughters, Mrs. Weldon. Jane has been mistaken for our leading lady so often that I feel she has earned a chance to have a film test—if she wants one.”

Mrs. Weldon’s mouth opened but Jane cut in, agonized. She knew her mother would pour cold water on the idea.

“Oh, yes, I would, Mr. MacPherson. I should love it!”

My father wouldn't mind—and you wouldn't say no, would you, Mother ? ”

Mrs. Weldon hesitated and Mary piped up loyally. “ Oh, do let her, Mummy ! ”

Mrs. Weldon flushed and fidgeted, her patrician features disapproving. “ Well, if it pleases her——”

“ Oh, thank you, thank you ! ” cried Jane ; then to Mr. MacPherson, “ Do you really mean it ? ”

“ Of course I do ! ” He waved his cigar again. “ And as for the kid sister——” Mary's eyes grew big. “—she'll have to wait a year or so before she joins the ranks of the film stars. There are too many difficulties about schooling for twelve-year olds——”

“ I'm thirteen ! protested Mary. “ Just.”

“ Well, up to fourteen its the same—except in very rare cases where exceptional talent is indicated.”

Mary's face fell, but she said determinedly. “ I'll try again.”

He patted her on the shoulder with a fat hand. “ That's the spirit. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Weldon—a pleasure to have met you.”

He turned away airily, Vernon following.

Jane did not move. She saw nothing, heard nothing. A film test. A chance to be a star. Glamour. Beautiful clothes. Admiration. Crowds pressing round her for her autograph. Success. Money. She felt quite giddy. Her mother's voice called her down to earth.

“ Vulgar, fat creature. As if I needed telling I've got charming daughters ! Don't you go and get ideas about this test, Jane. You're not an actress, I'm sure of that.”

“ Oh, Mummy, don't be mean,” flashed Mary indignantly. “ Lots of film stars can't act—they just look pretty.”

Jane didn't much care for her family's view of her ability to be an actress, but she was too excited to take exception to it. John Lang had been right. She was photogenic. She would get by all right. She had quite a nice speaking voice. She wouldn't be nervous. Why should she be ?

She knew all there was to know about being in front of a camera.

When they reached the riding ring the Gymkhana was over and this meant it was time to pack up and return to the studio with the Unit. She took leave of her mother and Mary, who went off together and then slowly returned to the Competition tent.

She went in quickly expecting to find it empty, but it was not. The Unit was there. Seeing who it was they suddenly rushed at her.

Jane found herself gripped by the hand, clapped on the back ; she heard cat-calls, whistles, shouts—and was utterly bewildered. Then suddenly it dawned on her that they had heard she was to have a test. She pushed them away from her. "I want my papers." But they would not let her go.

"Darling," said Jim loudly and earnestly, "when you're earning twenty thousand a year, remember poor Jim." He sobbed realistically, wiping his eyes on his shirt sleeves.

"And what about *me*?" enquired The Boy indignantly, his voice soaring up to a falsetto key. "Am I to be forgotten? Her first love, her true love? Never let it be said. Money will not turn Jane's head, will it, Jane?"

She tried to laugh. "Oh, shut up, can't you?"

But still they mobbed her, shouting and laughing. She looked wildly round for Irene, but she was not there. George was. He had not joined the others but was standing with his camera folded by the table, watching her moreardonically than usual. His detachment pulled her together. She wouldn't be ragged and bullied in front of him. She pushed forward determinedly.

"I want my papers. And I'm fed up with the lot of you."

The Boy bowed with a flourish and pushed back the others, crying: "Way for the Film Queen! Way for Jane Weldon, the Brown Bombshell!"

They all fell back, bowing exaggeratedly. This was too

much. Jane set her teeth and, blushing up to her eyebrows, snatched her papers and turned to go. But before she could get away Jim had seized her round the waist and heaved her up onto the table. They all started to clap. "Speech! Speech!" they cried.

Tears started to Jane's eyes. She felt humiliated. They were all hateful. And now George's detachment, sardonic as it was, seemed infinitely preferable to this insistent and overdone teasing, even if they meant it only in fun. She stamped her foot in a rush of helpless rage and the table rocked.

"Let me down! Let me down!"

But they only cried out louder: "Speech! Speech!" while she could hear remarks, meant for her ears, such as: "Ain't she got lovely legs? And look at that waist, oh, boy!"

Jane understood what it meant to want the floor to open up and swallow you. She saw a space, leapt wildly off the table, clutching her papers. Was aware of a pain in her ankle but ran, nevertheless, straight for the exit.

Outside she collided with someone who gripped her arm and said "Steady."

It was John.

A tear was trickling down her face and she was acutely conscious of her burning cheeks. "I'm—I'm sorry, John."

He righted his tripod which had slipped, glancing at her meanwhile.

"What's the matter?"

She struggled with a sob. "In there—they've been ragging me about——"

"About the test?" He grinned. "Never mind *them*. They're only children. Come along."

He piloted her along, talking. His friendliness soothed her. She managed to smile shakily and produced a handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes.

"Now we'll have to get cracking with those stills, won't we?" he asked, for they had never been done.

She nodded, but could not speak. He was so kind. He did not laugh at her, nor look sardonic like George. Her heart swelled with gratitude. She saw that he was taking her to the car park and hung back.

"I don't want to go back with the Unit," she said in a low voice. "I—I couldn't."

"You're not going to," he replied cheerfully. "Here's my car. Jump in. Irene wouldn't come with me, so there's room for Jane."

She got in beside him, still a little unsure of herself but steadier. The tears had receded and she began to feel a quiet glow. John believed in her. That was everything.

They turned out of the Show grounds and into the country lane. The full glory of a summer evening was all around them. The deepening shadows of the tall trees, the patches of mellowing light between them on the white road, the breeze in her hot face and the blue glimpses of sky through the ceiling of leaves all spoke of gladness, of the joy of living. It was very cool and green. John slowed up and turned the car into a tiny track and stopped it. On the other side of the hedge was a big stack. It smelt lovely.

He turned and regarded her, his head tilted on one side in characteristic fashion.

"Feel better?"

She nodded.

"You mustn't let things get you down, Jane. If you really want a film test, enjoy it just for the fun of the thing—don't build up enormous expectations that may prove a delusion. When you are as old as I am——"

"Are you so very old?" she asked, half pulling his leg.

"Thirty," he replied seriously; "and that's a lot more than you are." He held up a hand to enjoin silence, as she would have spoken, giving her a stern, schoolmasterly look. "As I was saying, when you are my age, you'll begin to realise that most of life is a series of illusions, and the quicker you learn to see through them, the quicker you get over disappointments and heartbreaks. Behind the illusion

there is a reality, but you'll never find it while you can still see the illusion."

Jane was chastened by his seriousness. At last she said: "Yes—my father has said something like that." She hesitated, felt a tremor of apprehension and then plunged on. "Do you mean that I won't be any good?"

He also hesitated before replying. "Now look here, Jane, don't be put off. Have fun out of it. But I think it's a chance in a thousand that you'll be anything but scared stiff at a test. You're not the right type, thank heaven."

She looked at him curiously. "Why thank heaven?"

He gave her one of his sideways smiles. "Actresses aren't as nice as real people—or very rarely. When they are, they're great."

"I see. I know I've never yearned to act. I only want to—to—well, show off, I suppose."

He shook his head. "Not even that. You had your chance to show off in front of the Unit just now. You couldn't, could you? You're only attracted by the glamour of being thought beautiful. You want to be told you are, loudly, publicly and often. Take my tip and wait till the right chap comes along and tells you it quietly, privately and probably only once."

Jane felt the tears rising to her eyes again, tears of self-pity. She could not believe there was anyone in the world she would rather hear this from than John himself, and there was silence.

He shifted, his face suddenly gloomy. "Funny thing, life. The one girl I want to say things like that to, doesn't seem to want to hear them."

Jane's heart gave a great leap and stuck in her mouth, so that her tongue seemed too big for her. She swallowed, and then with a great effort said as casually as possible: "Oh, who is that?"

He looked at her in evident surprise. "Well, surely you know?"

She was trembling with eagerness, half suffocated by the

beating of her heart, hot and cold with uncertainty. She only just stopped herself saying : " Me ? " and shook her head instead, fear as to what the answer might be cleaving her tongue to the roof of her mouth.

" Why, Irene, of course. I thought it was pretty obvious."

The scenery whirled round her head ; she went limp and numb with the release from her previous tension. Irene. It was Irene all the time. Of course. How stupid of her. How could she ever——? Of course that was right. She admired and liked both of them. What a fool she was. What a fool. And what an escape, too, she had had from giving away her extreme foolishness. She managed at last to say : " Oh, of course. But doesn't she like you ? "

He started the car up. " I don't know. She's the most elusive and exasperating person I've ever met. But I'm not beaten yet, mind you. Not me."

She glanced at his profile, set and stern. He gave her a sudden twinkle out of the corner of his eyes. " She doesn't know what she's up against."

Jane said nothing. She could only marvel that anyone could stand out against John Lang.

The car tore along the road to the studio. She no longer saw the glory of the evening. She felt flat and dull and cross. It was all very well for people to talk about finding reality, but it was not a pleasant thing to look at. She preferred illusion. Anyhow he had said Irene did not seem to care for him. He needed someone else's admiration to help him, even if he was not aware of it. And that someone else was Jane. Nothing could take away her right to look up to him. And Irene was an idiot not to see him as she did ; for all her brains she was an idiot, and John was far too good for her.

Her thoughts wandered to the film test. She was going to get through it somehow and be good. She'd show all of them. She found she was driving her fingernails into the palms of her hands as she thought how she'd show them all. She'd show John, too. Then perhaps he wouldn't waste

his time over Irene, who didn't see how wonderful he was . . .

By the time they reached the studio she had thought herself into her previous elation and certainty.

She'd show them all !

VIII. THE FILM TEST

WHEN Jane got home she saw her father emerge from the usual sea of newspapers, throw up his arms, his round cheerful face expressing a schoolboy joy as he shouted : " Where's our Film Star ? "

Jane threw herself onto his knee and gave him a bearlike hug, while Mrs. Weldon looked rather comical, for she was trying to be disapproving with a smile persisting round her mouth. Mary, not to be out of the picture, sat on her father's knee also until he said he had cramp and they both had to get up.

The question of clothes was brought up, but Jane pointed out that it was no use making any decision as to what she was to wear until she knew what lines she had to speak—it would probably be a scene from the next production.

When Mary had gone to bed and Jane was alone with her father for a while, his jocular manner deserted him.

" Jane," he said, " it's all very exciting, but you know I wouldn't build too much on it."

Jane tossed her head. " Oh, you too ! " she cried.

" And who else has been giving you good advice ? "

She looked away. " John Lang."

" Wise man."

Jane was silent. She was remembering that he cared for Irene and that Irene did not care for him. She could feel no resentment against John, but her opinion of Irene was suffering a severe test. Anyone who caused John any unhappiness was no friend of hers. Irene had no feelings. She was hard. Hadn't she been hard with her, Jane, over the Continuity, keeping her back, refusing to allow her to take any responsibility ? Yes, she had been mistaken in Irene.

Nothing more was said that evening, but Jane was restless when she went to bed and could not sleep. She wished she had not to be Irene's assistant on this production, and

to-morrow was the first day in the studio . . . she would have to face the Unit. She wondered at herself, for she had not told her father or any of the family about the scene in the tent.

She thought unhappily to herself: "If I had been a born actress I would have enjoyed the scene they made—I'd have known how to cope with it, but I behaved like any school-girl." She set her teeth and dug her nails into the palms of her hands. "I won't feel like that at the test. I'll relax. I'll forget I'm Jane Weldon." Then the tears sprang to her eyes as she thought that the Unit would be there, watching. It was going to be awful.

The next day was not nearly as trying as she had anticipated. Everyone was so frantically busy that they had little time to comment or gibe. Only Irene spoke of the test, for she had not seen Jane after the news got round. She was kind about it and Jane hated herself for being unresponsive. Irene must wonder what was the matter with her.

The set was interesting. The Fair at the Agricultural Show had been very realistically reproduced in the studio, complete with the Fat Woman and the India Rubber Man, both chosen from the Talent Competition, the latter being Mr. Eaves. He had recognised Jane at once and followed her about continuously, his horrible face constantly contorted. He made her feel slightly ill, and finally she enlisted Jim's help to shake him off.

Mr. Newbolt, spick and span and smiling from ear to ear, came over to Jane as soon as he saw her.

"Congratulations," he said. "I hear you are to have a film test."

Jane wriggled uncomfortably. "Thank you," she said hurriedly, rather aware that he was regarding her as if she were a specimen of strange insect under a glass case, "I expect I'll make an awful fool of myself."

He leaned towards her confidentially. "Well, from all I hear you couldn't be much worse than Gloria June, whom I've got to direct in this picture."

He went away smiling smugly.

As the day wore on Jane found this was true. Gloria was self-satisfied, bad-tempered and no actress. Mr. Newbolt was endlessly patient with her and she was always rude. Mr. Chalmers the leading actor, on the other hand, was charming.

In one scene he had to pick a quarrel with the Strong Man, who hit him over the head with a chair as he turned away. The idea of using a *papier mâché* chair was discarded, as it might double up and give the game away. Finally it was decided that the carpenters should take a real chair and loosen all the joints so that it would fall to bits when knocked. This would have the desired effect of making the blow look a severe one.

Jane was watching with amusement. The carpenters returned with the loosened chair ready for use. It was one of a pattern used all over the studio and was placed near another of its kind. There were several rehearsals, the Strong Man using the *papier mâché* chair and not actually touching the actor's head at all. Then the camera set-up was changed which entailed some of the furniture and props being moved. But at last they were ready to take.

Jane was timing the action and had the stop watch. The camera was running. The action started.

The action proceeded. Words were exchanged and the actor turned on his heel. Menacingly the Strong Man reached for the nearest chair and lifted it above the unsuspecting hero's head. At that very moment Jane saw that it was the wrong one !

She opened her mouth to scream ; had a moment of doubt ; and in that second the chair came down. The actor groaned realistically and slid to the ground. The Strong Man was left looking at the chair in rather a surprised way. It had *not* fallen to bits. Then he recovered himself, threw it down, and turned away.

" Cut ! " called Mr. Newbolt, rushing forward. " What the hell happened to that chair ? "

"It's the wrong one," said Jane, hopping anxiously from one foot to the other.

Mr. Newbolt picked the prostrate hero off the floor. "It was the wrong chair!" he repeated.

"You're telling me!" said the actor.

"It seems to me," remarked Jane a little later, as she sat on Irene's desk, "that in film production you're almost bound to get knocked out sooner or later if you're an actor. Remember the comedian and the negro?"

Irene smiled. "Yes—that's why all important artistes employ 'doubles' or 'stand-ins' to take the knocks. Women artistes also use 'stand-ins' to avoid the fatigue of standing for long periods while being lit."

"Really? Then they would have to be very like the actress?"

"Not necessarily in feature—in height, colouring, outline and general shape of face. They earn quite good money, especially in America. They are not very much used over here."

There was a lull while a big tracking shot past all the Fair stalls was prepared. Jane sat kicking her heels while Irene typed. She had a great desire to say something to her about John, but the words stuck in her throat and she was beset with indecision. She supposed it was cheek, but if she could help John, it would be grand; to be, as it were, his good angel. And if her help was no use, at least he would think the more of her.

"Irene," she said suddenly, her voice sharp with nervousness, "aren't you being rather beastly to John?"

Irene stopped typing and went very pale. She did not say anything for a moment, then pushed back her chair and, without looking at Jane, got up.

"I don't think it's really your business, Jane," she said. And walked off.

Jane had never felt so snubbed in her life. She blushed hotly and jabbed her pencil into the desk in order to keep her head down, hoping no one was watching her. The snub

was, alas, merited. It had sounded, even to her ears, the most awful temerity. Still, surely there was no reason for Irene to take it quite like that? She was being superior again, treating Jane like a child, someone whose opinion was of no consequence. From being humiliated, she began to be angry, to tremble. Irene was not only unfeeling, but unkind. She was no good to John. No good at all. And no good as a friend, either, for she was unfair. Tears of mortification and anger rose to Jane's eyes, but she forced them back. She wasn't going to show that she had been hurt. Not she. More than ever now she was going to be good in that film test. It was necessary to her.

Just at that moment she saw John come on to the set. He took some stills of the Fair set and spoke to Irene for a moment. Jane watched them narrowly. They seemed perfectly casual with each other. Then John came over to Jane, smiling.

"Ready for your stills, Jane? I've got an hour and Irene says she can spare you."

Jane sprang to her feet. "Yes, rather!"

She hesitated, wondering whether she ought to go and ask Irene for permission to leave the set, but John had asked. She picked up her things and went out with him.

"Irene seems browned off," he remarked as they went past the dressing-rooms. "Anything wrong?"

"No," said Jane cautiously, "not that I know of."

"This way," said John stopping.

Jane looked back in surprise. He was standing by the Make-up room, holding open the door.

"Have I got to have make-up for the stills?"

"Of course." He grinned. "You want to look like a film star, don't you—not just Jane?"

She smiled delightedly and went in.

Arthur the Make-up man was waiting for her, having been informed by John that his services were required. He whisked a white cloak round her, asked her to pin her hair up on top of her head, put a white band round her forehead,

so that she looked like a case with head injuries, and started to slap on the grease paint. Jane was intrigued.

Arthur—he did not seem to have a second name—always looked weary, which was hardly surprising considering he had to be at the studio long before the Unit, especially on the ‘crowd’ days. He could never leave before the last shot was ‘in the can’ and he stood all day, when not in his room working, holding his make-up case on the set. If he ever left the studio for a minute Jane noticed he was immediately wanted and a howl of “Make-up! Maaake-up!” would go echoing round until he arrived at the double. Altogether, Jane had decided long ago, his was the worst job on the Unit. And to add insult to injury, if the Cameraman lit a close-up badly, he always blamed the make-up, to which Arthur had no reply.

“Having a test, aren’t you?” he asked in a tired voice.

“Not to-day. Just stills to-day.”

“Oh. Then we needn’t bother so much. Be different when you have a test. Take a bit of trouble, see?”

Jane nodded, but wondered what the ‘bit of trouble’ would involve.

The face greasing and powdering was done, eyebrows outlined, lips painted with a brush—Jane was amazed at the contour of her own mouth—eyelashes mascara-ed.

“You don’t want false eyelashes, do you?” he asked.

Jane shook her head. “I don’t think so.”

He hesitated. “Better take a pair along with you in case Lang wants them. They only stick on—quite easy.”

He handed Jane two little strips from which stuck out fantastic eyelashes at least an inch long. She looked at them dubiously and took them between finger and thumb, listening to Arthur’s voluble, staccato instructions. Then she got up and departed, hoping she would not meet anyone.

She got through the main hall, only meeting one of the café staff. Then she passed two of the typists, who were so busy talking that they did not notice her until she was just past them. She slipped breathlessly into John’s room.

He was not there. Then she heard his voice from the studio.

"In here, Jane."

She went in. He looked at her appraisingly, then smiled. His lights were all on and his fair hair shone like silver.

"Here," he said beckoning. "Sit here while I have a look at you. I must consider the problem."

She sat down. "Meaning me?"

His eyes fell on the eyelashes held delicately between her finger and thumb. "What the——?" He took them from her and placed them carefully on a shelf. "I don't think we will need those."

"Thank heaven," she said.

She did not feel nervous. He was a wonderful photographer and she knew he would not let her down.

After a minute he said: "That neck is wrong. You want something light and shiny against your dark hair." He went to a drawer. "Here, let's drape this."

He put a length of spangled net round her shoulders and surveyed the result. "That's better; now you'll have to take off that jumper and put the net round your bare shoulders."

He went over and switched on a radiogram, while she did as he asked. "Music for every mood," he said.

After that he was quite silent, moved lamps about quickly, did things to the camera, said "Look over in that corner," or "A little softer, please," or "Now a big smile—very glad—your eyes, too," or "Just a little bit more round," and other similar injunctions. She found she could follow what he wanted easily. It was soon over.

He switched off the lights and she stood up.

"Good," he said, handing her her jumper, "if you're as easy in front of the camera at the test you'll do all right."

She gave him the tulle and struggled into her jumper, thinking to herself: "If John was the cameraman at the test I'd be all right—but those others!"

Emerging from the neck of her jumper she smiled at him. "Thank you for those kind words," she said.

"You can see the prints to-morrow."

"Oh, can I?" She straightened her hair at a mirror on the wall. "What time?"

"In the lunch break, if you like."

"All right. I suppose I'd better be getting back to the studio now."

She was half way through the door when he called out: "Don't forget to take the make-up off!"

She had forgotten. She looked back laughing. "Thank you!"

In the hall she ran straight into Mr. Newbolt. He removed his cigar from his mouth, staring at her.

"Oh, it's Jane. Just had your stills done? The test will be next week. Stratton will tell you. Mind you're good." He went on before she could speak.

The week crawled by. Jane was so immersed in her own sensations at the approaching ordeal that she failed to be interested in her work. It hardly mattered, anyhow, for Irene just got on with it and never asked her to do anything. Jane, setting her jaw, determined she would not beg for something to do and just stuck around, bored and aloof.

The stills were better than she had hoped in her wildest dreams. She really looked like a film star. John was delighted with them. Even George admitted they were good pictures, but added: "You've still got to prove you can act."

Jane, panicky but determined, replied, "You never know till you try."

And he had looked at her with that smile of his that maddened her: "So long as you don't mind failing."

She had not replied, for she *DID* mind failing. She mustn't fail.

Meanwhile the Unit, even to Mr. Newbolt, called her the Film Star. It was a great joke—to them, but not to Jane, though she tried to pretend it was. It had all become

frightfully important, though she couldn't exactly fathom why ; it had something to do with Irene and John. It was absolutely necessary to show both of them that she was good.

She got her part—a bit of the next script. It was a dramatic scene of a girl alone in a house that was supposed to be haunted. She tried over the lines to herself, but could not make up her mind how to say them. She asked Mary for her version, but Mary put on a sibilant stage whisper which gave Jane the opportunity to laugh and feel superior. She told Mary one did not act like that in front of a camera. The idea was to underplay, but she refused to read the lines herself, either to Mary or to her father, though both of them suggested she should. She pretended there was nothing difficult about them and she was not worrying about it.

But she aired her grievance that the part demanded the wearing of an ordinary afternoon frock and she would obviously have no chance to look glamorous, having to express apprehension and fear, which only made one look silly. It was a bit steep, she said.

She did not sleep well and kept worrying about the lines. In the studio she seemed always to be making mistakes. Irene asked her to fetch a frame for matching up from the Cutting Room. She brought the wrong one and Irene, with rather a set face, went over and fetched it herself. While she was away Jim asked Jane to match a close-up from Irene's notes. She did so and gave the directions wrong. The shot had to be re-taken when Irene returned.

After that Jane gave up attempting to help. She told herself that she was bound to make mistakes if she was never given any chance to act on her own responsibility. She felt she had a grievance and aired it to one of the artistes, a young girl in the crowd who sometimes spoke a few lines. She had taken to hanging round the Continuity desk when Jane was typing. She listened to Jane and agreed she was not being given a fair chance. Nor, she said, was she. She had done several 'bits' for the company and

here she was, back in the crowd. There were one or two nice speaking lines in the script for the Pub scene next week (she had looked it all up carefully)—and she would be so grateful if Jane would speak to the First Assistant about her? Jane said she would.

The girl moved off and Irene, who had been standing near, came up to Jane.

"Jane, if I were you I shouldn't mention that girl's name to Jim."

"Why ever not?"

"He won't like it."

Jane was on the defensive. "But I don't see why——"

"It's not done. Speaking parts are cast by the London Casting Office."

"I'd like to give the girl a hand. She's nice and very hard up."

Irene turned away. "You won't do her any good."

Jane bit her lip. Irene treating her as a child again! She deliberately went over to Jim and asked him if he would get the girl's name mentioned.

"Friend of yours?" asked Jim searchingly.

"Yes."

"Can't be done, Jane. No favouritism in the studio."

Jane flushed. "But Jim——"

He moved off to join in an argument with Mr. Newbolt. Jane was left, seething and alone. She would not return to Irene's desk, but left the studio without asking.

Looking at herself in the mirror in the cloakroom, she frowned. Why was everything going wrong? She looked her worst and to-morrow was the test. It wasn't fair. Life was bad . . . but she'd show them yet. She would. She would.

She slept fitfully but was dead to the world when the alarm woke her. The shock made her shake all over for a few seconds. She remembered. The test. Looked towards the window. It was a dull day. The tops of the trees at the end of the garden were swaying. Windy. No sun to cheer

her. She dressed miserably. Her hair was lank, her skin dull and pale.

She was not actually in any hurry to get to the studio for she had not to report for work until after the test, which was at 10 a.m. She only had to get there in time to be made-up. But somehow she didn't want to face the family over breakfast, so she said nothing about it to her mother and went down to have breakfast alone, as usual.

She ate in silence, aware that her mother glanced at her anxiously more than once. She was wearing her best frock—the pink linen that had been such a success at the Show, but to-day it did not suit her.

As she put on her hat, her mother said : “ Don't bother about that film test. Your work is much more important.” Her voice softened. “ And I don't really think I want an actress for a daughter.”

Jane turned and kissed her gently. “ Don't you, mother ? I don't think there's much danger.” But her heart cried out against the assertion. She did not want it to be true.

When she got to the Make-up room she found she had to wait, for Arthur had not yet finished with the crowd on production. She sat on a hard chair against the wall, reading periodicals, but unable to concentrate, half hearing the casual conversation of those waiting their turn.

Someone came in and she saw it was the man who swallowed his teeth. There was a chair vacant beside her and to her horror he took it. He seemed surprised to see her and asked her why she was being made up. She said hurriedly that she was having some stills taken. She was overcome with revulsion, for it occurred to her that if she became a film actress, she would inevitably be mixed up with this kind of person for the rest of her life, and she knew with certainty that she didn't like them. No doubt it was unreasonable and prejudiced of her, but she couldn't help it. They were not of her kind and she didn't like them. She suddenly knew she didn't want to be an actress, but wanted to run away and hide herself in a dark corner, not

to be made-up, stared at, lit and messed about and made to speak and move at the command of someone for a purpose that did not interest her. She found herself clutching the magazine in her hand and staring at the page unseeingly.

"Can I do you now, Miss?" It was Arthur's voice.

There was a titter and the conversation turned in general to wireless. Jane got up mechanically and went to the chair. It took ages. She was stiff and exhausted when he had finished and looked like a waxwork in the mirror in front of her, complete with artificial eyelashes and lips that were not hers and made her smile look utterly different. Her skin felt so thick that she was afraid to move it.

Arthur told her the hairdresser was waiting for her. She went next door and had her hair brushed, iron waved and brillantined. It looked terrible when it was finished, all its natural wave and softness gone. Her heart was sinking fast; her feet felt heavy, her hands cold.

She sat in a chair when she was ready and opened her script. She knew the lines by heart, but every time she tried to say them over to herself, they were gone. Her heart began to beat uncomfortably. Supposing she dried up?

At last Jim came in.

"Jane here?" He saw her. "My God!"

He came right in and stared at her critically. "Your hair is all wrong. Here Gerta—you've got the style all wrong—loose and natural, that's Jane. You've done her up like a dutch doll."

The blonde hairdresser looked bored, came up to Jane and ran a comb through the iron-waved locks.

Jim was not satisfied. "Better, but you've spoilt it. Don't you know naturally wavy hair when you see it? Or have you forgotten it exists?"

She gave him a boiled look and he grinned, took Jane's arm and piloted her out.

"It's not bad really," he said comfortingly, "but it would have been better left alone."

"I know," said Jane unhappily and wanted to burst into tears. Everything was against her.

"You're first," said Jim ; "get it over before they're all bored. Dick is photographing."

Jane knew she should feel relieved it was not George ; but surprisingly she felt nothing but dismay. George was much the best operator.

The small studio, rarely used except for tests, was bare and cold and dusty. The sound was bad, admittedly. Standing near Jim, Jane became aware that her knees were trembling. She tried pressing them together but then her whole thigh began to tremble. She relaxed, but that only worked for a few seconds, then she began shaking again.

Mr. Stratton, who was directing the tests, came up to her, smiling cheerfully.

"Got the words pat, Jane ? "

"I think so, Mr. Stratton."

"Here's Straker to light you. Come and stand over here. That's the style."

His hands were warm and kind as he placed her in front of the camera by a polished table. He talked glibly, trying to put her at her ease, his voice lilting in that manner he had when he was being persuasive.

"Now, you want to forget where you are entirely. Just think of the scene you're playing. You're alone in a house that's suppose to be haunted. You can't understand why there is no one in, as you had an appointment with your uncle ; or why the front door was open for anyone to come in. You're puzzled at first, then apprehensive, then finally really frightened. Now we've got to rehearse that turn round at the end of your monologue very carefully, because you're in semi-close-up and you mustn't make too big a movement or you'll spoil the final close-up, which I want you to hold. Tricky. But we've plenty of time, so we'll get it right. No hurry, you see. Plenty of time and as many rehearsals as you like."

Straker seemed to take ages with the lighting. Jane

stood, dazed, blinded, unable to see anything beyond the circle of lamps but vague outlines and moving white blots that were faces. Sounds seemed confused also, though she could, with an effort, identify them. It was all quite different out here in the lights. There was no reality, nothing solid, no sense of direction, no identification. She began to feel giddy and rested against the table behind her, but as soon as she took her weight off her feet, her legs started to tremble violently again.

"Qui-et, please!" said Jim's voice. She realised with a shock that the lighting was over and they were about to rehearse.

The lights were switched off and Mr. Stratton came up to her with the script and sat on the corner of the table beside her.

"Like to go over the lines with me first?"

Jane's mouth was quivering. "You read them to me," she said faintly.

He did so, pausing to describe the emotions he wished to be conveyed in her gestures and expression. She could not concentrate. She wanted something hot to drink. She could only think of a lovely steaming cup of coffee.

"Think you've got the idea?"

She nodded, unable to speak.

"Then let's try it."

He moved away from her and the lights went on. She blinked dazedly, stood up, saying the first line of her words desperately over and over to herself, trying to be unaware of the blank afterwards. She heard Mr. Stratton's voice from miles away telling her to "go ahead."

The words came, but they were too fast. She remembered nearly all the actions that had been suggested to her, but they were mechanical. Only the last frightened movement from over her shoulder right into camera was any good, because she didn't have to act frightened at all. As she stopped speaking she found she was trembling more obviously than ever. The lights went off. Stratton was beside her.

"Not bad, not bad," he said soothingly.

She giggled weakly and sank back on the table. "I don't have to act frightened. I am."

There was a sympathetic laugh from some of the Unit standing near. And suddenly she knew they were with her, not against her, as she had supposed; with her, trying to bolster her up. She wanted to cry. The tears welled up and threatened to brim over. She felt for a handkerchief, but had none. Mr. Stratton pressed his into her hand and everyone tactfully became very busy while she blew her nose.

"Now a second try, at once," said Stratton.

She pulled herself together. It was better, steadier. She nearly asked if they could take right away, but felt shy and didn't. Straker was not satisfied with the lighting and Dick was fidgety about the big movement at the end of the scene. She found herself restricted as to space. She must not move her foot farther forward than there, nor turn her head so violently. There were four more rehearsals. She began not to care. She had ceased to tremble and was only very anxious to get it over. She felt exhausted.

Finally Mr. Stratton said they could take and she was touched up by Arthur and the hairdresser. She had a feeling the Unit was disappointed in her. They were very silent. She could not care. She couldn't help it.

When the camera was turning she knew real panic. The rehearsals had been nothing to this. She could not speak for at least five seconds after Mr. Stratton's voice had said "Action—go ahead, Jane." Her hands were cold and clammy, her mind a blank. Then the words came back. She gabbled them. It was all mechanical like the first rehearsal. And it was N.G. for camera because she had come too far forward at the finish.

They took again. And again. The last take was O.K. for everyone, but Mr. Stratton hesitated. He came up to Jane. "Like to do it once more, Jane?"

Jane shook her head. She was beyond speech. She only wanted to get away, get this muck of her face and hide.

Stratton glanced at his watch. He had spent more than the allotted time on her and others were waiting. "Right," he said, "you can go."

In silence Jane hurried past the circle of lights, her enemies, and the Unit. She did not look at one of them and was aware of their uneasy glances. They were ready to smile at her if she caught their eyes, she knew, but she did not want their pity.

She went to the dressing-rooms and greased and scrubbed her face. Her hair was stiff with powder and iron waving. She looked as pale as death with the make-up off. Had it been bad? Had it? After all, she had not 'fluffed' her words and she had done all that was asked of her. She had not disgraced herself. Perhaps it had not been so bad. And she looked so good in the stills, perhaps she might look as good in the camera. . . .

She kept encouraging herself, refusing to face the small certainty that lingered in her mind that she had not been any good at all. She went to the café and had some hot coffee and felt much better. It was half-past eleven. She would go over to the studio, where she was expected, and do a lot of work.

Several of the staff asked her interestedly how the test had been as she passed through the dressing-rooms. Her head in the air she replied, "Oh, not so bad!" until she almost came to believe it herself.

Irene was apparently not very interested, which was a relief. She gave Jane the typing to do.

The day passed somehow.

At home she warded off all questions with the same casual air. Her father understood and did not press her. But her mother and Mary persisted in asking questions. She said she had a headache from the lights, and went to bed early. For hours she lay rigid, unable to relax. Never had she been so miserable.

IX. THE REAL TEST

JANE ran into the Production Office the next morning with a determined cheerfulness. It was empty but for Irene who sat at her desk with a curiously blank look on her face. Jane was struck to attention.

"You look queer, Irene—anything wrong?"

She looked up, her little, pointed face curiously childlike and wistful, then shook her head.

"We're striking the set to-day, remember, Jane?" she said quietly. "Will you go through the shots with me?"

"Of course," replied Jane, puzzled. She felt sure there was something wrong.

They went through the script carefully. There were six shots to do, all involving the leading comedian and a donkey. Irene was pessimistic about the donkey. They had had great difficulty with it yesterday morning when Jane was off the set.

"It's a nice little thing," she said to Jane, "but thinks of nothing but carrots."

Jane laughed and went to investigate. The donkey was there and the comedian was busy trying to make friends with it, offering it lumps of sugar and carrots. The donkey accepted everything calmly but proffered no friendship in return. The comedian pretended to be very indignant. Jane thought it looked docile enough, but soon changed her mind when the rehearsals started.

The first shot was supposed to show the comedian coaxing the donkey over to the cart, he himself walking backwards and falling into a small barrel of potatoes with riotous consequences. But nothing on earth would make that donkey budge a step. The comedian held a bunch of carrots in front of its nose and then stepped backwards. The donkey took no notice. Then, when the comedian wasn't looking, it simply snatched the lot, stepped back into its former position and munched placidly.

The Property Men were called in to do something. They tried flicking its ankles. It looked round, annoyed. They tried a close shot so that only the donkey's head and shoulders were in picture and the Property Men pushed from the rear. It lashed out with its hind legs. No one could be induced to go near it after that.

Finally the Property Master heard of the trouble and came in and considered the donkey.

"Leave it to me," he said.

Everyone got ready to take the shot—hopeless to rehearse. As soon as the camera was turning the Property Master picked up the donkey's tail and pulled hard. The donkey resisted. The more the Property Master pulled, the more the donkey tried to get forward. The Property Master let go. The donkey took several paces forward. The comedian retreated, dangling the carrots—and the shot was 'in the can'.

A close-up of the donkey munching was taken. Then four shots of the comedian falling over the barrel of potatoes, grabbing for something to save himself and getting hold of a concertina with the most terrific din resulting. The donkey, always an unknown quantity, obligingly looked extremely interested and then put back its head and neighed, which was just like a good laugh at the expense of the comedian. Mr. Newbolt was beside himself with joy at such a piece of luck.

There remained only one shot—a long view of the Fair with the comedian and donkey coming down between the empty stalls, having a talk, before the episode of the coaxing with the carrots. It was the connecting shot between the previous day's takes and to-day's.

They were just setting up and lighting when a page came in with a message for Irene. Jane happened to be watching her as she undid the slip and saw her lips tighten. She rose from her desk quickly, looking directly towards Jane.

"Jane!"

Jane went over to her. "Yes?"

"I've got to 'phone at once. Tell them to wait for me. I shan't be long."

Jane watched her go, frowning. It was unusual for Irene to leave the set without telling the Director herself. She seemed agitated. However, they were not ready yet, no doubt she would be back in heaps of time. She thought no more about it.

Rehearsals started almost at once on the last shot of the day. The donkey, who had been outside having a browse, was brought in and provided with the usual carrots. Mr. Newbolt asked for Irene. Jane gave the message. A rehearsal was gone through. No sign of Irene.

The Third Assistant was sent to look for her. He came back looking worried, but alone. Mr. Newbolt listened to him and seemed annoyed.

"Jane!"

Jane, sensing something was wrong, went over to him quickly.

"Yes, Mr. Newbolt?"

"Irene is not to be found. Do you know what can have happened to her?"

"She went to 'phone. She had bad news, I think."

"The telephone operator says she rang off some minutes ago, and now she is not to be found. It's very awkward. Can you check up from her notes?"

Jane's heart bounded. Of course Mr. Newbolt would trust her!

"Yes, I think so, Mr. Newbolt."

She went and fetched the notes, pleased to be of use though secretly worried about Irene. She found they were not even transcribed, so she quickly sat at the typewriter and typed out the scene of the donkey following the comedian as he stepped backwards. That was the matching shot. Then she took it to Mr. Newbolt.

He read it over. "Yes, details all match. What about the matching scene shot yesterday?"

"I'll fetch it."

Jane went and found that one too. She brought it to Mr. Newbolt. He did not take it, but said : " Any snags ? "

She read it through, pausing over the words ' donkey, as before '—that must mean donkey as it was in all the shots. It had been harnessed all morning—it was now.

" I can't see any snags, but I wasn't here yesterday morning, Mr. Newbolt."

He was very anxious to finish shooting and looked increasingly annoyed. " No, you weren't. Jim, can you think of any snags ? "

Jim shook his head.

" Shall I go and get a frame from the Cutting Room ? " asked Jane helpfully.

Mr. Newbolt frowned and glanced at his wrist watch.

" We're late striking the set now. We've got to give the men a chance to clear and start re-building for to-morrow. Is it really necessary, do you think ? "

Jane wanted above everything else to be a help. She could think of no possible hitch.

" I don't think so," she said. " There are no notes on either yesterday or to-day's typed shots about a special match-up, and Irene always makes a large note against a cross if there is anything special to remember."

" Good enough," said Mr. Newbolt.

The donkey was in the most amiable of moods and two takes were made in record time.

Immediately there was a hustle and bustle. The carpenters, Property men and electricians were only waiting for the words ' Strike the set ! ' to fall on it like a swarm of bees. Jane found her Continuity desk buried at the back of lamps and cables, picked up Irene's and her things and found her way through the jostling, busy throng, dodging flats and lamps, jumping cables, to the Production office.

Irene met her, white and agitated.

" They haven't struck the set ? "

" Yes," laughed Jane. " The last shot was over in five minutes. The donkey behaved beautifully."



She read it through, pausing over the words
'Donkey, as before'——

(facing p. 132)



"Oh, heavens! Let me check it over with you. I couldn't help being away so long. Bad news of my mother. She's very ill—heart attack. I expected it this morning."

"I'm so sorry," said Jane, surprised. She had not known Irene's mother was poorly. "Don't worry. I'll check with you but I'm sure everything is in order."

Mr. Stratton came by, paused, glancing at Jane as she stood by the office door. He beckoned her and she went up to him.

"Your test, Jane," he said, "I'm sorry——" He shook his head.

Jane did not allow her face to show that it was a blow. "Thank you, Mr. Stratton. I didn't expect——"

He smiled, obviously relieved that she had taken it so well.

"Frankly, neither did I." He hurried away.

She rejoined Irene, refusing to think. She was no good. But she hadn't really accepted the fact yet. She wanted time to digest it. She sat down at the desk, her mind not on her work at all, but curiously dead, numb, icy.

Irene read over the shot Jane had taken down, Jane transcribing it for her from her shorthand and typing it out at the same time.

"But what about the harness?" said Irene.

There was a curious silence. Jane swallowed. Irene went on.

"The donkey should have been without harness at the beginning of the big shot."

Jane stared at her stupidly. "I wasn't there yesterday morning, remember—and there was no note."

Irene, her face more worried than ever, turned over the pages of her script. Opposite the shot done yesterday was a large cross and on the page facing it in large writing: "donkey to be without harness at beginning of shot 234."

Jane stared. Everything rocked. The set was half out of the studio. It would have to go back again. She was to blame. She had failed as a film star. She had failed as a

Continuity girl. But was it her fault? Hadn't she offered to go to the Cutting Room and get a frame? Yes, but she ought to have insisted. Why had she not looked at the script itself, but only at the transcribed notes?

Irene had risen and was going to the door.

"It wasn't my fault," said Jane quickly, in a voice she did not know, "there was no note in your typing and even the one you typed yesterday only said 'donkey as before', and you see I have never seen the donkey anything but harnessed."

"No, of course," said Irene quietly. And left the room.

Jane sat there, hating herself, hating the world, hating everyone. After a long time, it seemed, Irene returned. She looked grave.

"Mr. Newbolt has left the studio. But I've told Mr. Stratton. The set is being put back for re-take to-morrow morning."

There was a silence, but Jane said nothing.

"These things always seem to happen when one is called away," said Irene unhappily. "It shows that one mustn't let one's private worries interfere with work. I'm sure you did your best, Jane."

This generosity was more than Jane could bear. It was so obvious that she had *not* done her best. Even if she allowed that she could have missed Irene's note in the script, she should have insisted on going to the Cutting Room for a frame, seeing that she herself had not been on the set when the previous day's matching shot had been taken. She was no good as a Continuity girl—or as an actress. She was no good at all. And John had not spoken to her for ages. . . .

She gathered up her things in silence and left the room.

If she had been unhappy before she was utterly miserable now. And she had to face the family. Of course, she could tell them the test was no good and that would entirely account for her depression. Somehow it held a very small place in her thoughts. She could only think of that other

failure. It stuck in her throat, refusing to be swallowed. She could not accept it as her fault. It was just as much Irene's fault, if not more.

The evening meal was eaten in silence. Her father talked for a little of the day's doings at his office. Jane saw him give a warning glance towards Mary, who started to ask questions about the result of the test. Jane went to bed early, before her sister. She was under the bedclothes when she heard her father's limping steps and the tap of his stick as he helped himself along. She tightened herself together, defying sympathy. He tapped at the door.

"Come in, Dad."

He entered, his stiff grey hair standing upright, his round, cheerful face alight with friendliness. He stumped across the room and crossed his arms on the bottom of the bedstead, leaning over.

"I'm not in the least surprised about the test, you know, Jane. And as for your mother, she's delighted. She was terrified of having a Glamour Queen for a daughter."

Jane managed a small smile, without looking at him.

He paused uncertainly, half turned away, then added :
"Is there anything else on your mind ?"

Jane started. What an uncanny gift of intuition he had ! But she looked at him with well-simulated surprise. "Oh, no, Dad—I'm just worn out with excitement. Good-night."

He came round the side of the bed and pecked her on the forehead.

"I'll send Mary up to bed. You want a good long night."

She smiled at him and this time there was some feeling behind the smile, but only a little ; she was still numb and tightly closed up inside.

"Thank you, Dad."

He went out, the light gone from his face. He was worried.

When Mary had come to bed and it was dark, she turned

her face into the pillow, suffused in self-pity, drowned in it, weighed down with it. A tear forced itself from her closed eyelids and she enjoyed the luxury of letting it trickle coldly down her cheek. Everything was against her. Why had it to be a Long Shot of the whole Fair set that went wrong? Why couldn't it have been just a close-up which could have been re-taken easily, anywhere? Why had that fool of a blonde hairdresser frizzed up her hair like that and made her feel worse than she need have done? Why had Irene been so beastly to her when she had tried to be a help over John?

There seemed no answer except that things were against her. She set her teeth. She would fight. She wasn't going to take all the blame. Irene had never been fair over the Continuity and she could pay for it now. It was her responsibility. She ought never to have left the studio just as they were going to strike the set.

A small voice told her that Irene had already admitted all that; still she should not have been so long and where had she 'disappeared' to? Where had she been when they could not find her? She had not said.

And what about Jane? Ought not Jane to have checked up what that phrase 'the donkey as before' meant? Ought she not to have insisted on getting a frame from the Cutting Room? But they wouldn't let her, they were pressed for time. Yes, but . . .

Ding-dong, ding-dong, the battle went on. About one o'clock she fell asleep and woke tired as if she had not slept at all. In a mood of anger and depression she went to the studio. She ran straight into Mr. Stratton, who stopped her, his brows knitted.

"Jane—how did that hitch occur yesterday?"

She started to explain hurriedly. "Irene disappeared and Mr. Newbolt would not wait, as we were late striking the set. I asked if I should go to the Cutting Room to get a frame to match up yesterday's work, but everyone agreed that there was nothing special to match. I had not been

in the studio myself when the matching shot was taken—the test, you know——”

He interrupted, less sternly. “Of course. Incidentally, I want you to see the test sometime with me, then you’ll see why it’s no good.”

She felt confused. “Oh, thank you——”

“Yes? About the hitch? I can’t believe there was no note on Irene’s books about the harness.”

“Well, there wasn’t—at least I couldn’t find it. On the shot taken the day before she had written ‘the donkey as before’ and as I had never seen the donkey anything but harnessed I’m afraid it never occurred to me that it might mean anything else. Stupid of me——”

“Oh, no—but still, Irene says there definitely was a note about the harness.”

Jane shook her head obstinately. “I looked up both lots of notes—the day before and the same morning and there was nothing about harness at all.”

He gnawed his lower lip. “The M.D. is furious. Putting a set back that size costs money. There’ll be a devil of a row, I’m afraid.” He hurried away.

Jane’s heart sank, if possible, even lower. What did he mean by that? She went slowly into the studio.

Jim was standing over Irene at the Continuity desk. He looked pale and savage and was speaking in an argumentative, sharp voice. He was saying:

“——well, you shouldn’t have left the set like that without letting me know where you were to be found. You knew it was the last shot on the set before it was struck . . . yes, yes, I know you only expected to be a few minutes, but you should have been get-at-able, then it wouldn’t have happened.” He caught sight of Jane. “Jane did her best with the checking up—after all, she had no warning and wasn’t in the studio the day before when the donkey was unharnessed. Nobody else remembered about the harness—it’s just one of those things that only Continuity can really check.”

"Or if Mr. Newbolt had let me get a frame from the Cutting Room——" interposed Jane firmly. "I did ask."

Jim waved his hand irritably. "Yes, yes. There simply wasn't time. Stratton's given me a first-class row, and I hear the M.D. is wild. This production has already cost far too much money and any extra is going to make it unprofitable. Such a very important shot as that! Any other in the script but that one!" He walked away, shrugging his shoulders.

Irene had not attempted to defend herself. Now she picked up her script and went to look through the camera, as quiet and calm as if nothing had happened, though she looked unhappy. As she neared the camera The Boy looked round with a malicious grin and said loudly: "Re-take for Continuity! And *what* a re-take! Couldn't you have managed a mistake on a smaller set, Irene?"

Irene smiled and shook her head.

Jane turned away. Irene was getting it all. No one had said anything to her. And that note—large as life in the script, 'Donkey to be without harness . . .' If only she had looked in the script. But she had only looked on the typed notes.

George was standing by The Boy, but to Jane's surprise he did not look at Irene while The Boy jeered at her, but looked past her towards Jane. Jane caught the look and flushed.

Irene came back to the Continuity desk. Jane marvelled at her composure. She was taking it so well.

The unlucky shot was re-taken and there was a break before shooting could continue as the Fair set had to be struck for the second time. The Sound crew drifted towards Jane and asked how the hitch had occurred. She gave her version, becoming more and more sure each time she described the incident, that it was not in the least her fault. Each time, too, she affirmed that there had been no remark about harness in the notes. She conveniently forgot

to mention that it had been in the script, where she, Jane, should have looked it up.

She had just finished telling the Second Sound engineer this story when she noticed George turning over the pages of Irene's script that was lying on the desk. He closed it just as she saw what he was doing, and his eyes met hers. He gave her a long, pointed look, then deliberately turned his back on her.

Jane stood rooted to the spot, hot all down her spine. He had read the note and knew she was telling a half lie, evading the truth, getting out of all responsibility. If it had been anyone else but George, she would have rushed up to them and said: "Of course, I know it's in the script, but I didn't look for it there. I looked in the obvious place, the notes." But it was George. And he said women were no good for Continuity. Too temperamental. Not to be trusted. He had said those things and now he was getting confirmation.

In a flash she saw how appallingly she was behaving and felt suddenly that she was standing on a very small piece of ground that was rapidly being washed away from under her feet by black, swirling waters. She was horrified at the position she had put herself in. She must tell someone, own up, explain, put herself right, do something. But tell who? Do what?

She looked wildly round for Irene. Where was she? Nowhere. Everyone was drifting slowly out of the studio. It would be at least an hour before shooting could re-start on the smaller set that was being put up as the Fair was pulled down.

She walked round the studio, but there was no sign of Irene. She went into the Production office but there was no sign of her. She went to the telephone operator and asked if she knew where she was. She didn't. Distractedly she went back towards the café. She must explain and apologise to Irene and take her share of the responsibility.

One of the typists stopped her in the hall. "Oh, Jane,

we were so sorry to hear the test was no good. Rotten luck."

She stared at the girl dully. She had forgotten about the test.

"I don't mind," she said quickly. "I never wanted to be an actress. Do you know where Irene is?"

The girl looked taken aback. "No, I don't."

Jane entered the café and saw George. Something made her go up to him.

"George, where is Irene, do you know?"

He did not look at her. "Yeh, I know."

He was laconic, uncommunicative, as usual. She could have shaken him.

"Well, wherc?"

"She's in Mr. MacPherson's office."

She stared at him in dismay. "In—why?"

"On the carpet, I expect," he said.

Jane caught her breath. "Oh."

"Oh," he mimicked. "And is that all you're going to do about it?"

She felt her temper rising. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," he rejoined coldly.

She did. And she was angrier than she had ever been with him.

"I don't!" she cried.

"Pity," he said gently. And walked away.

Before she had thought at all she was in the hall and tearing up the stairs to Mr. MacPherson's office. She was outside, panting slightly, her hand raised to knock. She paused. Was she making a fool of herself? "Pity," echoed George's voice. She knocked.

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Irene was standing by Mr. MacPherson's desk, holding her script to her, very pale, very still. Mr. MacPherson was half back to her, looking out of the window into the glory of a summer's afternoon. The wide green lawns

stretched pleasingly before him, but he did not look pleased.

They both turned as Jane entered and looked at her. She closed the door gently, trying to control her hurried breathing and the beating of her heart.

"I'm busy, Jane," said Mr. MacPherson testily.

"I know." She paused uncertainly.

He raised his eyebrows, his fleshy face pursed and even indignant. "Well?"

"It's about the same thing that I've come. It was my fault, you know."

"Your fault?" Mr. MacPherson glanced quickly at Irene, who had flushed red. He flung himself peevishly into a chair, "Irene says it was hers. How can that be?"

Jane stepped forward and took a deep breath.

"There were two—no, three things I should have done to check up and I did none of them, Mr. MacPherson."

"Why not?"

Jane thought wildly: "Because I did the only checking I could think of and it led me to suppose further checking was not necessary." There was a slight pause. "I was wrong."

He tapped his desk with his fingers. "You mean you had the means of checking and did not use them? Irene's notes were in order?"

"Yes, they were. The note about the donkey's harness was in the script. I didn't look in the script, but only in the notes. The notes said 'donkey as before' and I ought to have checked what 'as before' meant. I didn't. I assumed it meant harnessed." Her voice trailed away unhappily. "One ought never to assume in Continuity, I know."

Mr. MacPherson seemed interested. He leaned forward.

"There was a note in the script saying the donkey had to be without harness for the last shot taken on the Fair set?"

Jane nodded. "Yes. I didn't look in the script."

He glanced at Irene. "Why didn't you tell me this,

Irene? I had a complaint that there was no note at all to that effect. Several people said so."

Irene looked very embarrassed, but did not reply. Jane blushed furiously.

"It was I gave that impression, Mr. MacPherson. I tried to cover up the fact that I had not looked in the script. It was my fault."

He pushed back his chair and swung himself backwards and forwards.

"I can't think why Irene chose not to defend herself. Her work is much more important than yours, Jane. You're only an apprentice at this job. I was considerably shaken, I admit, when it seemed Irene had fallen down on this, for it argued that she was not in the habit of making accurate notes, which I could hardly believe."

There was quite a long silence. Jane did not dare look at Irene, but was horribly aware of her heart beating in her ears, and of the stale smell of tobacco in the room.

"Well," said Mr. MacPherson at last, "it looks as if there isn't much to say. The whole affair has cost the company a lot of time and money. It's been most unfortunate. As for you, Irene, it was extraordinarily kind of you to wish to shield Jane, but I still say you ought to have let Jim or someone know where you were. I know you were upset, of course, but in business——"

"Yes, Mr. MacPherson," said Irene in a small voice.

There was another slight pause. He got to his feet.

"Well, you can both go. And Jane, I hope you'll take your Continuity more seriously in future. I think all that test business must have upset you, eh?"

Jane hung her head. She felt very stupid.

"Yes, I think so, Mr. MacPherson."

"You're not cut out for an actress. Try to be a good Continuity girl. There's a future in the job."

"Yes, Mr. MacPherson."

"Run along now, both of you." He fished out a new cigar from his desk and started to light it.

They turned and went out together. Jane followed Irene, who paused uncertainly in the hall.

"Irene, I'd like to talk to you. Have you time?"

Irene glanced at her gravely. "Yes."

She turned and led the way to the Cutting staff's rest-room. They were not there at that time of the afternoon, as she had anticipated. Once inside and the door closed Irene said gently: "You needn't have come to Mr. MacPherson about that, you know."

Jane sensed the distance between them and knew that she alone was responsible for that distance and hated herself.

"I felt bad about it, Irene, because I had deliberately refused to admit any share of the blame."

"It didn't really matter to me. You see, I'm leaving here soon and hoping to go as assistant to Michael at the new North London studios."

"You mean, you'll not be doing Continuity any more?"

"I don't think so. Of course, I may be no good as an Editor."

"Oh, I'm sure you will be. I'm so glad, Irene."

There was an awkward pause. There was some warmth now between them but the constraint was still there. Irene made a little movement to go, but Jane had a lot to say that was struggling to come out and getting jammed in the process. Almost unconsciously she put herself between Irene and the door.

"Don't go, Irene. I—I want to say things. Mr. MacPherson was right when he said the test had upset me. It sort of turned my head. Then I heard I was no good just before we checked up on that fatal shot. I was upset. I couldn't admit another failure. So I let you take the blame. Can you understand?"

Irene smiled. "Of course. I'm sorry about the test. And I want to apologise for snapping you up when you said I had been beastly to John. It was because I was worried about him myself and knew I had been rather—well, beastly to him."

Jane was so taken aback at this admission that she could only say, "Oh?"

Irene hesitated, seeming embarrassed. Jane looked at her in surprise for Irene seldom blushed and this was the second occasion that afternoon she had done so. She seemed to feel impelled to go on with the subject, though it was evidently difficult for her.

"Jane, I feel diffident about talking to you about John—you see, I thought you——" she paused helplessly.

It was Jane who blushed now and to cover herself plunged desperately into the breach. "Yes, go on—you thought I was making rather a fool of myself about him. I know I was. I thought there was no one on earth like him. And when he told me he cared for you, I was furious that you should treat him so coldly—and—and rather hoped he would look at me when he realised you didn't want him—especially if I was a film star. You see, it was all mixed up with my desire to be glamorous so that John would fall for me, although at the same time I wanted him to have what *he* wanted, which was you—and altogether I got into a terrible muddle." She found her eyes were full of tears and sniffed them back indignantly.

"You poor kid," said Irene, distressed, "I didn't realise it was as difficult as that. I should have made you talk about it, instead of staying in my shell. It's an awful fault of mine, to keep away from things. A sort of moral laziness. That's what John tells me. He understands me, you see. And anyhow, I've a lot to be grateful to you for, Jane."

"To me?" Jane blew her nose violently.

"Yes. All this business of getting into trouble with everyone made me feel rather sorry for myself, and mother being ill and so on, and I found to my surprise that John really was the person I liked best in the world. I came out of my shell just long enough to recognise the fact—and we're engaged."

Jane gasped and Irene went on, smiling.

"It's not official—you're the first person to know it, because you really caused it to happen."

Jane saw that she was smiling all over her little face—the old, familiar, delightful, warm smile and she felt such a rush of happiness that something good had come out of the stupid muddle she had created that she found herself kissing Irene's cheek and saying, "Oh, I *am* glad, I *am* glad, Irene. What fun! What fun! I'm so glad, really!"

And the tears she had just sniffed back came trickling down her face and this time she didn't bother to conceal them.

"But what about the new job?" she asked, when she had blown her nose again. "Do you intend to go on working after you are—married?"

Irene looked thoughtful. "For a while, anyhow. You see, John has to get settled in a new job, too. This company is not big enough and I've heard unofficially that they are amalgamating with a larger concern. There are bound to be a lot of staff changes."

Jane was surprised. "Oh, really? Then what does John intend to do?"

"He's trying for a job in the North London studios. Michael is helping him."

"Michael is? He's not jealous?"

Irene laughed. "Whatever gave you that idea? Michael and I have never been anything but good friends."

"Oh, I see." Jane considered. "You know, Edna and Lila knew about you and John and made various remarks—and I, like a perfect idiot, always took them to myself. You remember when John helped so wonderfully with the Continuity when you had 'flu?"

Irene nodded.

"I thought it was all for me. I see now it was for you—so that you wouldn't be let down. Your name would be on the titles. I never thought of that at the time. Oh, Irene, you must have thought me a silly!"

"Indeed I didn't," said Irene warmly. "That's one of

the things about John that have always made me uncertain about him—he's too good-looking. I don't like competition."

"Well then, you're just right for him," declared Jane. "You say you're so diffident and tucked in your own shell—he'll be too busy digging you out to notice anyone else!"

This seemed a good joke and they both roared with laughter.

"Well," said Irene a few minutes later, "I must get back to the studio."

"I'll join you when I've washed my face," said Jane, grinning. "Cold water and a new make-up is called for."

Irene went out. Jane sluiced her face. When she was drying it she caught sight of herself in the mirror. Her eyes were shining, her mouth curved happily. She looked like herself, not that awful misery that had confronted her for the past few days. She thought of John and Irene. She had been so glad, in her relief that no harm had been done; now Irene had gone she felt suddenly sad and isolated, but no longer unhappy. John was still to her a wonderful person who, because he had never actually touched her life at all, would always remain wonderful.

And Irene. What a darling she was! How could she possibly have thought all those silly things about her? It was Irene's nature to be reserved, quiet, uncommunicative, to walk by herself and to be just herself. That was what was so charming about her—she understood it now—Irene was always herself, always Irene, not temperamental, unreliable and impatient like Jane, but always the same, self-effacing and quiet but there if needed. John needed her. They would be happy.

She looked out of the window before leaving the room. She, Jane, had helped them to that happiness.

From here she could see the little stream that wound in and out of the rushes at the bottom of the lawn. Birds were singing. The sun was shining. Little round clouds rolled lazily across the sky. There was no more muddle

within her. Perhaps, if she really worked hard, they would keep her on in Irene's place when she left. . . .

She turned eagerly from the window to the future. There was so much to learn, so much to do, so much to be happy about. She would make good yet. She felt sure she could, not because she thought, as she had some time ago, that she knew everything, but because she knew there were so many things she had *not* learnt and she was going all out to learn them from now on.

X. DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT

FOUR months later Jane sat on the edge of a canvas chair in front of an island hotel, rather surprised to find that she had achieved an ambition—to appear in a film.

She was uncomfortable. A bustle made it awkward to sit. Her bonnet was tight and the strings under her chin choked her. Her hair was sticking to her make-up and despite a short, voluminous cape, she was cold in the October wind.

It had happened like this. A Unit had been sent to the Channel Islands to film a sea picture set in 1820. Some of the action took place in the steamboat of the period, an open-decked barge-like affair which had dummy paddles and a funnel and was supposedly operated by steam but was, in fact, operated by a petrol engine. The leading lady, after three weeks of slipping about on rocks and getting frozen in high winds, had refused to go on board this strange boat, the seaworthiness of which she was not alone in doubting, and had insisted on a 'double'.

No one blamed her for, apart from the possible danger of foundering in the old tub that had been 'dolled up' for the occasion, the currents round the island were notable for their strength and there were many submerged rocks. The small auxiliary engine would be almost helpless against the currents, especially as she was to be towed up to a good speed and then left to her own steering. The last straw had been when the leading lady discovered that the helmsman was to be one of the actors and not a sailor, although he said he had had some experience of sailing.

There being no possibility of finding a 'double' without at least a week's delay, Mr. Newbolt, who was directing, had asked Jane if she would oblige. She was only a little taller than the leading lady and the right colouring and shape. Her face would never be sufficiently visible under the poke bonnet to be recognised. Jane, rather

pleased, but a little apprehensive (for she could not swim) had agreed.

Now she sat outside the hotel, cold, and wishing she had said 'no'.

Irene came out, sensibly attired in slacks and a warm overcoat and sat beside her, grinning.

"Lucky pig," said Jane enviously. "I feel cold and awful."

"You look most fetching," declared Irene.

"I don't mind it this morning," said Jane, "we're only doing the in and out of harbour stuff, but this afternoon, when they wreck the thing—I don't think I'll go on it—would you, Irene?"

"I would not," said Irene emphatically. "I think it's all wrong that they should attempt the wreck at all. It could be done as effectively and without any risk in model shot. The weather is bad and the light poor. I'm sure it will be a wasted effort. I can't think why Mr. Newbolt doesn't insist on leaving the shot and doing it in the studio with models."

"It's the Producer, isn't it?" asked Jane, lowering her voice and glancing round. "He's got money in it and thinks the real thing is the only way."

"That's about it. Pity these men with money rush in as Producers and mess things up. Why can't they leave it to the people who know what they're doing?"

"Beats me," said Jane. She fluffed out a flounce of her cape. "Anyhow, I'm in the picture."

"You certainly are," agreed Irene. "But take care before the day's out you aren't in the swim."

"I can't swim!" said Jane pathetically.

Irene rose, laughing. "I'll tell Jim to look after you. He can life-save."

Jane brightened. "That's a comfort. He'll be on board, won't he?"

Mr. Stratton came up wearing a grin, a beret and a greatcoat.

"All ready to be sunk, Jane?"

"No, I'm not."

"But you're a passenger on the steamboat."

"I'm a passenger on the steamboat—under protest—when it leaves the harbour and returns. I am definitely not a passenger when the thing is run on the rocks."

"But," teased Mr. Stratton, "you'll have been 'established'."

"I don't care," said Jane firmly, "one of the men can wear my clothes. It's only a long shot."

He grinned. "I think you're wise, Jane. I'll find someone."

He went off, taking Irene with him.

Jane, uncomfortable as she was, could not fail to appreciate the loveliness of the view in front of her. A green field stretched away towards the sea. Trees stood out darkly against the pearly grey of the sky. A faint pinkish glow suffused the horizon, boding ill for the weather for the rest of the day.

At about half-past eleven it cleared up sufficiently to galvanise the Unit into life. They packed into a couple of hansoms, which were the only transport available on the island, and rattled off down the hill towards the harbour. A cart followed with the apparatus. A body of local fishermen, fine bearded men with red apple cheeks and vivid blue eyes, followed walking.

Jane, with Irene, sat up on the box seat in front. The tall, raw-boned horse trotted swaying round the last bend, and they just caught a glimpse of the sea on the left before they dashed into a long tunnel. The noise of the rattling hansom and the clip, clop of the horse's hoofs echoed madly. Jane thought they sounded like a detachment of artillery at full gallop.

They came out suddenly on to the cobbles of the harbour side. The noise died away behind them, as if it would have liked to pursue them, but lacked the strength.

A row of houses had been built for the picture, but now

they were finished with and it had been raining hard for the past two days. Hunks of plaster were knocked off here and there. The windows lacked curtains and panes of glass were missing. They looked battered and dejected.

While the apparatus was unpacked, Jane went to the harbour wall and looked over. Grey as was the day, the depth below was blue. A little out to sea the current made white horses in a long procession, passing between some vicious looking rocks. On each side of her towered great rocky red cliffs, stained with every imaginable hue and topped with green. Below, on the slipway, lay the fishermen's boats in orderly rows, their nets spread out to dry.

Jane turned a little. On the quiet harbour water the 1820 steamboat lay tilted on one side. The tide was low and she was not yet afloat. She looked rakish, her long black funnel sticking up at an angle from her black and white deck, giving her the appearance of a late reveller in evening dress lying in the gutter, unable to rise.

The fishermen said the sky was clearing. Everyone started to rush about. One camera was sent down to the beach to take a low angle shot of the steamboat leaving and entering the harbour. The other camera was to shoot down from the quay at the harbour entrance. Irene ran from one to the other taking instructions and marking set-ups. The steamboat was now afloat. A terrific yell went up : " Everyone on board ! "

Jane rose clutching her skirts, stumbled over the cobbles, ran up the slipway, round the harbour and down the steps, leapt over an insecure plank placed from the steps to the deck and, leaving only a small section of petticoat behind, got safely aboard.

Besides Jane, representing the heroine, there was the Captain of the steamboat, another passenger, an 1820 ' beau ', who was the heroine's escort—actually the engineer in charge of the boat, Alec the second engineer, who stayed below and worked the dummy paddles and made smoke up the dummy funnel by stuffing smoke bombs up it, Jim, who

was there to help him, and George, a sailor, who was to instruct the actor who was playing the part of the helmsman. Neither Jim nor George were in costume and were supposed to keep out of sight in the very small 'engine' room or lie in the scuppers.

They were towed off and turned towards the harbour entrance. Once moving the towboat left them. The camera on the quay started turning amidst a babel of shouted instructions. Jane, seated near the paddle wheel, waved her parasol to an imaginary crowd. The shouted instructions to 'go on waving', 'look as if you're saying good-bye', 'speak to the Captain', etc., seemed endless. From below came the rattle of machinery, hoarse voices shouting and strange smells.

From the scuppers George, the sailor, was glaring balefully at the amateur helmsman and begging him to 'keep it straight'. The actor was nervous. The harbour entrance was narrow. The steamboat was clumsy. They only just missed one of the walls and Jane, in her anxiety, forgot to wave her parasol. Loud speakers bellowed from the quay: "Wave, can't you, wave! Look as though you're leaving harbour! Captain, walk about! Look busy! Do something!"

Thus admonished the Captain strutted up to Jane and the engineer, her escort.

"I hope you're looking forward to the trip," he said with a charming bow.

"Indeed we are!" replied Jane, with an equally charming inclination of her head—this was to hide her face as they were now passing directly under the camera.

"That's a lie!" he said graciously, and passed on, touching his hat.

They were now at sea. There were dangerous rocks to each side of them. The tow boat picked up the rope and started to steer a straight course between them. They had been instructed to drop the rope when some little way out so that a long shot could be taken. Apparently they took the steamboat too far for Jane, looking back, saw several figures dancing on the sea wall, flourishing megaphones.

"I can't hear, can you?" she asked the engineer.

He shook his head, leant over and yelled down to the engine-room. "Cut the engine. Can't hear the instructions."

The engine died. The smoke ceased. The Second engineer's head came up, grimed and pale. He breathed the fresh air deeply. Jim also came up, very red in the face, which was unusual for him.

"There's no room for me," he complained bitterly to the engineer. "I have to sit on the engine."

The engineer gestured for silence and held his ears forward and listened.

Faintly came a babel of yelled instructions.

"More smoke!"

"Drop the tow rope!"

"Get the tow boat out of sight!"

"More smoke!"

"Revolve paddles!"

The engineer's face was a study. He had heard enough. So had the second engineer.

"Start up again," said the engineer.

"Those smoke bombs will be the death of me," said Alec, resignedly. "I ought to have a gas-mask." He went below with the air of one going to the scaffold.

The tow boat was signalled to drop them. It did so, rather suddenly when going fast. The engineer waved to them to get out of the way. They did. Almost at once everyone saw that the current was taking them straight on to the rocks on the right. The tow boat had kept them straight but the engine was too feeble to go against the current.

"Put the tiller over!" bawled George from the scuppers.

The actor put it over the wrong way. The rocks rushed towards them. Jane stifled a scream by biting her hand.

"T'other way!" roared George and the engineer together.

He put it the other way. The current was strong and the tiller was obviously being wrenched from him. He struggled gamely to hold it.

"Sit on 'er!" yelled George.

The actor obediently sat on it. Still the boat went on towards the rocks.

"Lay on 'er!" screamed George.

"Are we going to hit those rocks?" asked Jane faintly, wondering dimly if her petticoats would hold her up for a while.

"Can't you swim?" asked the engineer anxiously.

"Not—in these trousers," replied Jane, and giggled feebly.

Simultaneously the engineer and George the sailor launched themselves on the tiller and put it hard over, screaming to the tow boat to pick them up. The rocks veered away a little. The tow boat rushed to their assistance.

Jane looked back towards the harbour, her mind running on Continuity. The cameras were turning no doubt. She saw little figures with megaphones dancing on the sea wall and making sweeping gestures. Of course they wanted the tow boats out of the way. They could want. No doubt they thought it a good opportunity to film the wreck.

The tow boat turned them and headed them for the harbour. Having speeded them up it let go.

Jim looked out of the engine-room, sweat on his brow. "I can't stand this heat much longer," he said.

"Tell Alec to make more smoke and turn those paddles round," said the engineer callously, flicking his neck ruffles. "And keep down, both of you. We're approaching harbour."

Jim disappeared. Fearful smells came from below and belches of smoke. The funnel looked as if it were on fire. The paddles shook the boat.

"We'll drop to bits at this rate," observed Jane.

There was a frightful moan and Jim shot out of the engine-room and sprawled on the deck.

"Keep down!" said the engineer fiercely.

"I've burnt my seat," moaned Jim. "That engine!"

"Hide!" said Jane anxiously. "You'll be seen. We're getting close to the harbour."

"Where?" he asked.

Indeed, where? Jim was over six foot. Jane looked round desperately.

"Here, behind my petticoats," she said, sweeping them aside. He rolled obediently, clutching the seat of his pants. Jane spread her skirts and held her umbrella at arm's length, hoping devoutly that Jim was covered.

The harbour entrance loomed nearer. It looked awfully narrow. George was cyeing the tiller from the scuppers. The helmsman looked petrified. He kept saying "Which way? Is this right?"

They went steadily towards the right-hand wall.

"The other way!" implored the engineer, looking straight ahead with a forced smile in case he was within camera range.

The actor put her over—far too much. They nosed for the opposite wall. A confused babel of instructions reached Jane from the quay.

"Mind her bow!"

"Fend her off!"

"Put the tiller over!"

Jane thought all was lost and they must inevitably hit the left-hand wall. Even then she remembered to keep her face away from the camera on the sea wall.

At the last moment George leapt from the scuppers and at the same moment Jim heaved up from under her petticoats like a whale emerging from the deep, nearly tipping Jane over in the process. Between them they rammed a short ladder over the side and fended the steamboat off the wall. Everyone breathed again. The megaphone instantly screamed at George and Jim to get out of sight.

"All right!" growled George, thoroughly shaken. "T'boat 'ud 've bin matchwood if I'd a-stayed where I was!" He lay down trueulently.

They turned into the harbour. Jane became aware

that she was not acting. She started to wave wildly, pointing out imaginary people to her 'beau'. But he was too worried about bringing the steamboat in to respond.

"We'll hit something yet," he muttered.

A stentorian voice bawled through a megaphone just above them.

"You're coming into port! Look as if you're coming into port! Captain—take charge—give orders—shake hands with the passengers!"

He did not seem to hear. He was pale.

"Captain," said Jane politely. "Shake hands with your passengers."

He looked at Jane vaguely. She smiled and held out her hand.

"A delightful voyage, Captain!"

He shook her hand. "You're a liar!" he said, touched his cap and walked away.

At this moment a pale, dirty face reared itself out of the engine-room hold. "Are they still turning?" it mouthed faintly.

"The cameras or the paddles?" enquired Jane.

"The cameras."

She looked round hurriedly. "I don't think so."

"Whether they are or not," said Alec, "I'm either going to faint or be sick."

The engineer hauled him out by the collar, laid him on the deck and gave him brandy.

The performance was over. At least for the morning.

Over a well-deserved lunch, Jane, feeling more human in her everyday clothes, discussed the afternoon's work with Irene. The few minutes of morning sunshine had gone and the sky was an unbroken grey. The Producer said it might clear up, and anyhow it was the last few days of shooting and he wanted the wreck scene tried, even if it failed. Also it was the last of the high tides for the season which would allow the steamboat to be run between the chosen rocks and

be safely straddled on their ledges where it could be shot on the next day, high and dry at low tide.

Irene told Jane that Jim had found out from some of the local fishermen that they fully expected a storm of wind within the next twelve hours, if not sooner. It was possible that the two small motor boats taking them round the coast to the point from which the cameras were to operate would be forced to turn back, for their auxiliary engines were useless against the currents under storm conditions. It would be difficult to get all the apparatus down the cliff path if they went overland, so they had decided to go by sea. As for the wretches who had to go on the 1820 steamboat, they obviously risked being sunk, storm or no storm.

Everyone, bar the Producer, who had found the boat and had it dolled up, agreed that it was unseaworthy. It was to be towed by two boats right through the rocks, where the tow ropes would be dropped and the steamboat allowed to come on alone and wedge itself. At least, that was the idea. No one liked it. Now, at the last moment, Mr. Newbolt and Mr. Stratton were attempting to dissuade the Producer from taking the shot, using the weather as a protest. But the Producer remained adamant. He had got it into his head that the 'real thing' was much more spectacular than any model shot and he was not going to be put off. It was the first picture into which he had put money and by gosh, it was going to be good!

Resignedly the Unit put on mackintoshes and piled into two motor boats. Jane and Irene went with George, The Boy and Mr. Newbolt in a fishing smack with a small engine. They were towing a dinghy in which sat a local fisherman. No one knew anything about boats or engines but the owner, a friend of the Producer's, although Jane had done some sailing with her father on one glorious holiday four years before on the Norfolk Broads.

Once outside the harbour they were in the current. The engine chugged away like mad, but no visible progress was made. The sails were hoisted, Mr. Newbolt helpfully

bungling every instruction given him by the owner. The water continued to sweep by at a terrific pace ; still progress was scarcely perceptible. After about half an hour they had got through the worst of the current. The steamboat was just visible ahead, a black blot rolling heavily. Gorge, no sailor as Janc remembered from his trip in Portsmouth harbour, seemed devoutly thankful he was not aboard the steamboat. Having passed this remark, he looked rather pale for a few minutes, then lay down in the bottom of the boat. Janc tactfully failed to notice.

They got into the cross currents. Mr. Newbolt, rather blue about the nose, chatted brightly with the owner.

"Are these currents really dangerous?"

The owner, a long-nosed, beady-eyed individual with hair thinning on top was curt, even morose.

"Yes."

"Do you know this part well?"

"Yes."

"How fast do they run?"

"About twelve knots."

"Why are they so dangerous?"

"A lot of boats have turned turtle hereabouts, trying to change course. It's practically fatal if your engine fails."

Janc listened with growing apprehension. The waves were high and seemed to be getting higher. They were heavily loaded with camera equipment and shipping water all the time. It was cold. She pressed close to Irene who also looked worried.

"Irene, do you think we shall be all right?"

"Heaven knows! I wish Jim were here."

"So do I. But there's the dinghy. At a pinch, if we're turned over, we might get picked up. Ladies first."

"Oh, definitely ladies first," agreed Irene with fervour.

Mr. Newbolt was now in ecstasies over the rocky coast, which certainly presented a spectacle of rugged grandeur, the waves breaking in great columns of spray against the rocks. Every now and then he wanted to stop and take a

picture, but neither the owner nor George were encouraging. George still clung to the bottom of the boat.

Suddenly there was a shout from the rear. Everyone looked back. The tow rope had broken and the dinghy was rapidly receding on the current. The sailor apparently had no oars !

"Damn !" said the owner. "We'll have to turn and quickly too !"

He pulled the tiller over. The boat turned, mounting the waves steeply and falling into the hollows. Water poured in from all sides. Jane held tight and thought to herself : "If we turn over, I'm done—all these heavy clothes."

They caught up with the dinghy, fairly scudding along with the following current. The man threw the broken rope. There was a moment of chaos when everyone tried to catch it and missed. The owner pushed the tiller into The Boy's hands, as he was nearest, and caught the rope end himself. As he tried to make fast he screamed "Turn her !"

The Boy obeyed, blindly, looking absolutely terrified. Waves sprang at them from all directions. They rolled, pitched and shook. He kept turning. He didn't straighten up at all. The owner snatched the tiller from him and in a couple of seconds they were head on again.

Everyone sighed and slumped with relief. A few moments later The Boy edged carefully away from his seat. He was not going to risk having command of the tiller again.

Jane had just noted that she was now in a dangerous position and was wondering whether to essay a move also when, without warning, the engine failed.

"Out of the way !" yelled the owner.

The Boy, who had just seated himself on the engine-hatch leapt up like a scalded cat, as did Irene. They were off and heaped on top of George in the bottom of the very wet boat in less time than it took for Jane to realise what was happening. And she found the tiller in her hands.

"Thirty seconds of this and we're over !" gasped the owner, the hatch up, his hands busy with the engine.

Jane just caught a glimpse of the dinghy disappearing behind them in the hollow of a huge wave and then turned her eyes forward, setting her teeth and saying to herself: "Head on. I remember Mr. Moss (her father's yachting friend) telling me you must always keep a boat head on to the waves." She held the tiller hard. The pull was fearful. It was all very well to say head on, but in these cross currents, there were two lots of waves. The biggest was the only choice. Head on to the biggest waves—which was the way they were going.

The boat bucked and rolled like a maddened horse. Thirty seconds he had said! Surely it was that now. The tiller pulled. Jane held on. The waves loomed and passed. She was wet and frightened and shaking from head to foot.

"All right!" came a yell.

Jane dared to look back. The engine was humming, the hatch closed. She surrendered the tiller more thankfully than she had ever given up anything in her life.

The Boy and Irene rose from the bottom of the boat, wet and wobegone and took their seats on the hatch again.

"I'm soaked!" wailed Irene.

"Never mind," comforted Jane, "you're not as wet as you might have been." She looked down at the prostrate George anxiously. "He'll get his death of cold," she said.

"Yes," said Irene.

"Jane!" called Mr. Newbolt, "you were magnificent. The way you hung on to that tiller!"

"I was afraid to let go," confessed Jane.

George did not move. He lay regardless of screams, warnings, falling bodies, puddles of water. He was probably concentrating on a vision of *terra firma* and refusing to allow anything to obtrude. Jane was still anxious about him. She said to Irene: "Do you think he'll be fit to photograph?"

Mr. Newbolt caught the remark and looked alarmed. "He's got to," he said, and wrapped his scarf more firmly round his neck.

Jane felt sorry for George.

After what seemed hours they sighted the steamboat at anchor. The rocks between which she was to run were magnificent and menacing. They stood about a hundred feet high. The passage between them was roughly thirty feet across. There was a jutting platform on each of the inner sides, some feet below high water mark. It had been judged that if the steamboat was run into the passage at high tide she would stick on the platform and be left high and dry at low tide ; which was what was required for the purposes of the story.

Unfortunately high tide was not until five o'clock. Bad as was the light now it was bound to be worse then.

They passed the steamboat and hailed the passengers.

"Had a good trip?" yelled The Boy facetiously, through cupped hands.

The stoker, Alec, looking somewhat pallid, called back "Bee-utiful!" and made suggestive gestures over the side. George, who had cautiously sat up, turned his face away and closed his eyes.

They cruised around, waiting for instructions from the other boat containing Mr. Stratton and the Producer, together with the rest of the Unit. At last it was decided to land on a small beach with the second camera staff and apparatus. George and The Boy were ordered to a small flat rock in mid-sca. There was a short silence when the order had been given.

"I trust it is not covered at high tide," remarked The Boy.

No one replied.

"Anyhow, it doesn't rock," said George, eyeing it almost with love. He evidently had no idea of making a pun.

"I'll come with you," said Jane suddenly. "Irene can go with the others on the beach."

"Why should you?" asked Irene indignantly.

"Obviously you'll do most of the shooting from the beach," said Jane. "You can move set-up. We can't."

"Jane's right," said Mr. Newbolt. "All the same, there's no need for either of you to go on the rock."

"I'd like to," said Jane. "Now we've got here, I want to see the wrecking from as close as possible. Besides, I've got a tea basket and I'd like to share it with as few people as possible." She grinned.

"Mean thing," said Irene, smiling. "Anyhow, our tea is coming down to the beach by hansom cab and the cliff steps."

"Tea?" asked George, awaking slightly. He looked interested.

The dinghy came alongside to take them off. Jane helped Irene and Mr. Newbolt aboard. It looked a dangerous proceeding. There was a big swell and it was impossible to keep the two boats closely alongside. They got safely in and went off.

When the dinghy returned from the beach the swell had increased. Every time Jane put her leg over to step on the edge of the dinghy, it shot up past her and then bobbed down out of reach. Finally she got one foot on the seat. The next moment she found herself doing a most painful gymnastic known as 'the splits'. The Boy obligingly picked up her heel from the boat and shoved. She fell wrong way up into the bottom of the dinghy, aware of a shriek of laughter behind her.

She righted herself and glared at The Boy indignantly as he followed.

"I'm covered in bruises," she said.

George passed the apparatus silently, still concentrating. He hoped to reach that rock before the worst happened. At last they moved off.

The rock neared. It was about fifteen feet out of the water and very steep. There seemed positively no way up, but the fisherman pulled round it until he pointed out a shelving ledge, on which it would be just possible to step and claw one's way up to the top.

"Ladies first," said The Boy politely.

"Not much," said Jane.

But there was the apparatus to handle and she thought better of her refusal and made the attempt. Somehow she got on to the ledge, stepping off the bobbing dinghy at the right moment, and found herself flat against the rock. Slowly she crawled up, using her fingers to hold on. It wasn't so difficult. Once on top she turned round and grinned down at the others.

The Boy was already on the ledge and reaching down to take the first piece of apparatus. Jane knelt ready to lean over and take it from him. In this way all the apparatus was safely got to the top, including the precious tea basket. George followed and, once on top, sat down and sighed deeply, resting his head on his knees. He was at peace.

Jane looked round. She could see the beach on which Irene and the others had been landed. They were no longer there. No sign of the camera. She searched carefully. Ah, there they were, climbing a rock to the right. No doubt to get a better elevation. She half turned and looked out to sea. It was sullen and choppy. Not a break in the grey sky anywhere. The steamboat rolled at anchor. It was only four o'clock. There was an hour to wait for high tide.

She turned and looked up at the cliff. On top was gathered a crowd of interested locals. They had come to see the wreck. Seagulls flew restlessly about, as if wondering what all the fuss was about.

Jane sat down and opened the tea basket. There was a slight drizzle and it was very damp everywhere, so tea was particularly delightful. George sipped gratefully and revived. After two cups a little colour came back to his face and he produced the inevitable chewing gum. "He's all right," thought Jane with some satisfaction, for the tea basket had been her own idea.

She explored the rock curiously, and came upon a deep cleft. Looking down she saw that it ran into quite a large opening below, like a cave. The rising tide was rushing in and out, gurgling, bubbling and roaring. The damp rock walls were streaked with reds and yellows and greens. Shell-

fish were massed here and there in clumps, while between them grew coloured sea anemones like jellies at a party.

George slowly prepared himself for the shooting. He spread his mackintosh on the rock and put the camera on a low stand and lay behind it, focusing and checking up. The Boy was busy loading.

About five o'clock there were some signs of activity. The two white motor boats which were to tow the steamboat to the rocks picked up the lines and stood by. The other motor boat, containing the Producer and Mr. Newbolt, gave last instructions to those on board and then withdrew. The signal was given. The tow boats started off.

It was getting dark. Great rolls of black cloud lay along the horizon, obscuring what light there might have been from a vivid red sunset. The coastline behind them looked sombre. The rocks on which the steamboat was to run towered black and threatening. George kept looking anxiously towards the west.

"If only the clouds would break. . . ." he muttered to himself.

Shooting could not start until the tow boats had passed through the passage and disappeared out of view. They were at the entrance now. They disappeared behind the rocks. The ropes went slack and sank beneath the waves. The tow boats had dropped them and were hurrying away. The doomed vessel approached the rocks.

The camera started to hum ; then stopped.

"Blast," said George. "Jammed."

The steamboat was moving quite fast, her funnel smoking furiously. Alec was doing his stuff. Jane had ears only for the camera. It was humming again. George's eyes were glued to the viewfinder.

"Working?" Jane asked of The Boy. He nodded, lips pursed.

Now the nose of the steamboat had entered the passage . . . then . . . crash !

The noise was distant, but distinctly audible. At once

there was terrific activity aboard. Little figures in costume rushed madly up and down the decks.

George removed his eye from the finder.

"What's happening? Can't see a thing? Shall I go on turning?"

The Boy looked at the west. So did George. He turned off the juice and stood up.

"Light useless. What's up?"

The three of them strained their eyes towards the wreck.

"Looks as if they've sprung a leak," said the boy, "They're shouting—for the tow boats I think."

The tow boats were circling about, anxious to keep clear of the cameras. The steamboat was obviously sinking. Suddenly Jane saw something in the water. She clutched The Boy's arm.

"Boy, there's someone in the water!"

"Golly, so there is!" His voice rose to an excited scream. "Look, someone's gone overboard after him. It's Jim! I swear it's Jim!" He hung on to George, dancing with excitement. "He's got him. He's got him. Now they're throwing a lifebelt."

"The tow boats are coming," shrieked Jane, equally excited, hanging on to George's other arm.

"Jim's got the lifebelt. They're all right. Good for him!"

The stern of the steamboat was well down in the water. The tow boats were nearing. Two dinghies put off and were soon under the sides of the sinking ship. The actors were taken off and rowed across to the tow boats. The whole thing took less than ten minutes.

As the dinghies reached the tow boats the three of them cheered madly. There was a faint echo. Jane looked up and saw that the group on top of the cliffs were waving and calling.

It was getting quite dark. Suddenly, too late, the clouds broke and a lovely red sun shone out. The sullen sea became rose tipped, the rocks were dyed as if in blood. As the orb sank below the horizon the glow faded. Everything became

grey and cold. Excitement gone, the three of them packed up and then sat and waited to be fetched. Their feet were wet, their clothes damp, there had been very little to eat. Dinner and a warm fire seemed a long way away.

"How long will it take to go back?" asked George unhappily.

"We needn't go by boat," said Jane to cheer him. "There's a hansom waiting up there."

She waved to the top of the cliff. George stared.

"But how does one get up there?"

"By a path—two hundred steps or more. I've been once with Mr. Newbolt."

He sighed. "Well, we'll get warm walking."

At about half-past five a dinghy came for them. The tide had gone down considerably, but not low enough to uncover the little ledge by which they had landed. It meant jumping from a crevice about four feet above water.

With some difficulty the apparatus was lowered into the dinghy. It was not the same dinghy that had brought them, nor the same fisherman. It was a very small dinghy and when The Boy had joined the apparatus Jane saw it was very low in the water.

"Aren't you rather overloaded?" she called down to the fisherman.

He glanced casually over the side and said he thought perhaps he'd better come back for them. Then he looked at the sky and the sea and shook his head.

"Getting rough," he observed. "Maybe I'll have to send another boat—with an engine."

"Oh," said Jane.

She and George watched dismally as the dinghy pulled away. She sat down, conscious that she ached all over, that her hair was hanging in damp corkscrews over her nose and that she must look like a wreck herself. George sat also, hugging his knees. There was a silence. It grew perceptibly darker.

Jane thought to herself: "How strange to be sitting on

a rock in the middle of the sea, alone with George, whom I have always detested, on a cold and stormy evening. Do I wish he were John ? ”

And as she tried to think what it would feel like to be left alone with John in such circumstances, she found to her immense surprise that John no longer meant anything to her at all. He had never been real. He had only been what she made of him. George, now, was real. And she no longer hated him. He was quite friendly, when you got to know him.

“ The sky’s nice,” she said, looking at the great pillars of black with their subtly changing outlines against the purple yellow-streaked sky.

“ Nice ? ” His voice was gently sardonic, but no longer directed against her. “ What a word to use ! ”

“ Well, you know what I mean.”

“ Do I ? ”

She smiled to herself. He couldn’t help teasing. There was another long silence.

“ Do you think I’m getting on with Continuity ? ” she asked at last.

“ What do *you* think ? ” he countered.

She considered. “ Six months ago I was quite sure I could do a picture on my own. Three months later I knew I couldn’t ; now I think I could.”

“ That’s about it,” he agreed. Then he added, apparently addressing himself to the sky : “ You’re all right. I take back what I said about girls. They’re not all the same.”

Jane was so overwhelmed at this admission that she could think of nothing to say. So she said nothing.

“ I think I hear oars,” she said at last, straining her eyes through the twilight.

She was right. It was the larger dinghy. In a minute it was bobbing up and down three feet beneath them. There was quite a width of water between it and the rock.

“ Can’t you come closer ? ” she called.

“ No, Miss. There’s the ledge underneath. We shall have a hole in t’bottom.”

"Well, look out. I'll have to jump."

She jumped, fell across the seat and cracked her shins so painfully that she just lay there, clutching them. George landed on top of her.

When they had disentangled themselves he apologised. She held her shins and said nothing. She was thinking of the two hundred steps up the cliff, but was beyond complaining.

The keel of the boat ground into the shingle. They got out heavily, immune to wet, soaked as they already were. Jane toiled up over the stones, slipping and scrambling. She felt George take her elbow.

"It's my shins," she said. "I've laid them both open on the boat seat, I think."

He grunted, looked upwards and groaned. It *did* seem a long way up. The path started in a slope covered with loose stones which slid from under their feet. Then it became a series of giant steps, the edges of which were reinforced with stones which fell away as they stepped on them. Jane got slower and slower, leaning heavily on George. He did not seem to mind. Her head ached. Her eyes ached. Her shins ached.

Suddenly, round a bend, they came on someone blocking the path. It was Mr. Newbolt. His blue nose sticking out from his scarf, now wound round his head, he stood with his hands behind his back, gazing at something with a fatuous expression. They followed his eyes. It was a tiny waterfall. He seemed quite unconscious of their approach.

Jane muttered something about her sock and sank on to a large stone. To sit was heaven. And the waterfall was indeed beautiful in this unexpected place in the half light of evening. Encouraged by the rain it trickled down in a furrow it had made for itself in the red rockside. Little tender, green ferns twined lovingly over it. In the silence in which the sigh of the sea made only a vague background, the sound of the water was like the tinkling of distant sleigh bells.

Jane became aware that her shins were throbbing much more now that she was sitting. She turned one trouser-leg

up and inspected. No need to pull her sock down. It was torn through and she could see she was cut almost to the bone. There was nothing she could do about it.

"Bad?" asked George.

"Yes, awful." She let her trouser-leg fall and got up.

Mr. Newbolt had moved on and they followed him.

At the top an old victoria waited, its bony horse drooping between the shafts. The driver, all grins at their sorry appearance, watched them climb in and whipped up.

The horse had been standing for about two hours. At first it went backwards. Then it tried to turn round. Jane, aware that the cliff was horribly near, but too tired to do anything but loll in her seat next to George and try to keep her heavy eyelids open, hoped for the best. The horse then bolted a few yards and stopped short. Jane and Mr. Newbolt, sitting opposite, fell into each others' arms.

They disentangled themselves and sat back. The driver lost his temper. He started whipping the animal and shouting at it. Mr. Newbolt begged him to stop, fearing dire results. The driver took no notice. Finally, as they feared, the horse took the bit between its teeth and bolted in earnest.

The path was little better than a footpath and full of holes. They rocked, rattled, swung and creaked. Jane was past caring but she held her hands over her shins. She couldn't bear it if they were hurt any more.

They reached a road and it was worse. The horse literally flew. Loose stones whizzed about. Hedges scraped the sides of the vehicle. Trees loomed up, rushed at them and sheered past. The driver all the time went on shouting and using his whip.

They rocketed round a corner the wrong way. The driver pulled up, panting. He turned and grinned at his passengers.

"It's nothing. He's a bit fresh."

This obvious understatement was accepted in silence. It took ten minutes to convince the horse that it had to go straight on and not turn right. Every time the driver pulled its head it made a complete circle. The wonder was that

the shafts did not break. When it finally took the right road it evidently considered it had had enough fun and trotted along gently.

George broke the silence.

"Mr. Newbolt—the wreck will have to be done in model."

Mr. Newbolt rubbed his nose. "I knew that from the beginning."

George shifted irritably. "Then, why the devil——?"

"Ask the Producer," said Mr. Newbolt.

There was another silence.

"Well, perhaps we can get some shots on the wreck to-morrow," said George.

But they didn't. It was not there.

XI. CONTINUITY GIRL

It was almost Christmas again.

Jane sat on a chair marked CONTINUITY, her eyeshade casting a greenish shadow over her face, her stop watch dangling from her neck, script on knee, pencil in hand. The rehearsal of a big musical number was going on and one of the famous dance bands was delighting the Unit with recent popular melodies. Groups stood about, arms folded, whistling or humming to themselves as the orchestra swung from tune to tune. A smart evening-dress crowd sat at little tables on the night-club set, singing the choruses.

It was the last day of her first production as Continuity. The time had flown. So concentrated had she been on doing well, that she had not even had time to worry about possible mistakes. There had been none—that is, none that could not immediately be rectified, and Jane felt justifiably pleased with herself.

“Moouooooon. . . .” crooned the crowd.

The music swept stealthily round, wrapping them all in a soft mantle of sentiment.

Looking round Jane wondered why, once in the film studios, people so seldom broke away. Wondered also why the crowd came back and back again for the pittance they earned; why that call to be ‘ready made-up on the set at 9 a.m.’ held a glamour for old and young, a glamour that ‘got’ and held them. Yet perhaps she understood now, after just over a year in the studio.

There was a lure in such days as this when, in a false world, one so lost sense of reality that one shared with the audience that would one day see the production the belief that it *was* real. Al lthe rest, the discomforts, the strain, the demands on time, temper and nerves, only added to the glamour.

Still Jane puzzled over it—where did the glamour lie?

Was it in the music? The lights? In the meeting of strangers? Or in the glittering sets?

It was in all that. But there was much more. There was a sense of creating something, common to the ordinary crowd artiste or the humblest member of the Unit. Everyone responds to that vanity. The disappointments of life seem compensated, she thought, if one can create something. And with a film there is a dim realisation that it is going to move vast crowds of people, to sway them either to laughter or tears. That one has contributed something to this gives a sense of power, of achievement.

"Blue-oooooooo," groaned the crowd.

What was going to happen to her, Jane?

Irene had gone and was joining the new North London studios as assistant Editor. John also had gone to the same studios. He had got a big chance and was taking it with both hands. He and Irene were to be married quietly almost any time now.

Several others of the staff had departed. Still there was no definite news as to what was going to happen to those remaining when the amalgamation was completed. Would they keep her on as Continuity? Would she be considered experienced enough for a bigger concern? She had only one production to her credit. A delightful glow of pride invaded her as she remembered that her name would be on the titles for the first time: Continuity....Jane Weldon. Wouldn't the family be thrilled? She must try to get tickets for them all for the pre-view.

"You-hooooooooooooooooo," moaned the crowd.

The music trailed into silence and a wave of clatter and rush took its place. They were getting ready for the take—a big tracking shot.

Jane rose, smiling to herself, remembering that first day in the studio and the tracking shot and the artiste who had fluffed his words. It was as clear in her mind as if it had been yesterday.

"Qui-et, please!" roared Jim, tall, pale and tense, his



They were getting ready for the take—a big tracking shot

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eyes darting savagely over the crowd, like a collie dog with a lot of recalcitrant sheep.

Jim had become someone rather special since that day he had dived into the current and rescued the artiste who had been thrown off the wrecked steamboat. The Unit was thrilled to own a hero, and hero he was, for the man had struck his head on the rocks in falling and was unconscious and badly hurt. He would have been drowned for a certainty had Jim not acted promptly, risking death himself in diving off so near the treacherous submerged rocks. He had survived their hero-worship in a remarkable way and Jane, remembering her own period of swell-headedness, thought he was particularly wonderful. He must have a nice sense of balance.

The Boy had been promoted to Second Camera assistant and was responsible for focusing. He hoped, like Jane, to stay on with the amalgamated company. In fact, those who were left of the Unit frequently met after production and discussed the possibility of their all being taken on. There was a family feeling that looked with trepidation on the idea of their being separated. They were a team, a Unit—more, they were friends. They could afford to take others in, yes, but not to separate.

George joined these meetings though he only listened—and chewed.

Shooting was soon over. Methodically Jane gathered her notes together, checked camera and sound sheets and then walked across the empty studio. She had a queer sensation of ending a phase. There seemed to be echoing faintly behind the deserted set a note like a finale. It was perhaps the last production to be made in this studio under the old company.

She walked over the dusty floor strewn with cables, cluttered with lamp stands and odd pieces of wood and other 'props', aware of this cessation, suspension—not quite an ending. The 'working' lights did not reach the roof with their feeble radiance. It seemed like a black sky above,

illimitable, the cat-walk hanging like a ghostly bridge in nothingness.

In the Production office she found Mr. Stratton talking to Jim. He looked up.

"All checked up, Jane?"

"Yes, Mr. Stratton."

"Good for you. Nice work you've done, Jane."

She smiled with pleasure. "I've enjoyed it."

They went on talking. She put away her papers in the Continuity desk and lingered. Mr. Stratton sensed she wanted something.

"Not going, Jane?"

"Yes, Mr. Stratton—but—do you think I could get tickets for the pre-view of the picture?"

"Tickets?" He looked at her sideways. "What for?"

"The family."

He laughed suddenly. "Oh, the family! They want to see their daughter's name on the titles, eh?"

Jane grinned. "Yes, Mr. Stratton."

"Of course. How many?"

"Four, please."

"Leave it to me."

"Oh, thank you! Good-night. Good-night, Jim."

She slipped out, their answers following her, hurried down the corridor and into the main hall, smiling to herself. The telephone operator put her head out of her compartment.

"Hey, Jane—you're wanted on the 'phone."

"Oh, thank you—I'll take it in the typists' office."

She went into the empty typists' office and picked up the receiver. It was Irene.

"Irene—what news?"

"Jane, are you finished for to-day?"

"Yes—why?"

"Could you come to Waterloo station at 11 p.m. to-night?"

"Why—yes, whatever for? You're not——"

"Yes. John and I were married this afternoon, and we're

catching the night mail to Cornwall. You see, I've suddenly been put on to a picture and we wanted to get a week away together before I start work."

"Well!" Jane gasped and swallowed. "Of course I'll be there. A quarter to eleven for the 11 p.m. train. Is that right?"

"O.K. And we'll be by the ticket barrier."

"I'll find you. And Irene, thanks for asking me. I'm—I'm thrilled."

Irene laughed and hung up. Jane replaced the receiver, her cheeks flushed, her eyes alight. So they were married. She felt pleased, delighted, satisfied. She found herself saying under her breath: "Oh, I do hope they will be happy!"

The family were interested. They had always sensed Irene was a good friend to Jane. Her mother disappeared into the kitchen and returned with a small parcel.

"Home-made truffles for Irene, for the journey," she explained.

"You ought to take some flowers," said her father, over his inevitable newspaper.

"Flowers on a night journey to Cornwall!" echoed her mother contemptuously. "Be practical, Howard."

He grinned and retired behind his paper. "Well, chuck a horseshoe or something," he said. He emerged from cover swiftly. "Confetti! That's the stuff."

"They'd be furious," said Jane, laughing.

Her father shook his head. "Times have changed," he observed. "In *my* young day people were proud of getting married; now they seem downright ashamed of themselves."

At twenty minutes to eleven Jane emerged from the Underground and hurried to the 11 p.m. departure platform. She saw a hand upraised, waving. There they were, John and Irene, looking self-conscious and smiling. Irene was wearing a yellow and brown check tweed suit and an adorable little tweed cap pulled over one side of her fair hair.

Jane seized her by both shoulders, kissed her and pushed her away, looking her up and down.

"Irene—you look so smart! Were you married in that suit?"

"Yes, I'm glad you like it."

"Don't I come in for any of this kissing business?" asked John plaintively.

Jane blushed, smiled and kissed him hastily.

"I—I hope you'll both be very happy," she managed. "I do, really."

"She does really," said John to Irene.

Irene took Jane's arm. "Don't be such a tease, John."

They walked down the platform. Jane remembered the parcel dangling from her finger and gave it to Irene.

"Home-made truffles, from mother, for the journey."

"I say, that is sweet of her. Please thank her, Jane."

"I will."

Conversation somehow got stuck. John suddenly found he had to buy some cigarettes from somewhere and left them. The two girls walked on slowly, threading their way between luggage trucks, passengers and porters. The platform hummed with life. They spoke of Irene's new job and John's also. Then Irene asked Jane if she had heard what she was doing herself yet.

Jane shook her head. "No." She paused. "But if they don't keep me on there, I suppose I could get a job at another studio. I hope so."

"Of course," said Irene. "All the studios are screaming out for good Continuity girls and you'll have your name on the titles of this one, won't you?"

Jane smiled. "Yes. I'm getting tickets to take the family to the pre-view."

"That will be fun. When we get back you must come and visit us at the North London studios—and at our flat."

Jane's eyes widened. "You've got a flat! Is it nice?"

"Small, modern, comfortable. Do very well for the time being while we're both working."

There was a pause. Very shyly Jane asked suddenly, "Are you happy, Irene?"

Irene seemed to come back from a long way away, and smiled and squeezed Jane's arm. "Of course." Her smile broadened. "And I won't be—beastly—to John again!"

"Oh, Irene!" Jane protested.

It was the only time she had ever known Irene tease. They both laughed. John came back and the three chattered together.

"You know those stills you did of me, John?"

"My masterpieces?"

"Yes." Jane smiled. "Mary has got them plastered all over our bedroom wall, so I have the eternal punishment of looking at myself."

"Doesn't matter," said John swiftly. "They're not a bit like you. Just any film star."

"Nonsense!" cried Irene. "They *are* like Jane."

"Anyhow, thank heaven you didn't photograph me the day I was tested. I looked awful."

"Um. They did make rather a mess of you, I must say." He looked at her slyly. "Do you still want to be a star?"

Jane shook her head vigorously. "No, thank you."

"What a relief. We've so many already who can't act, haven't we, Irene?"

Jane stamped her foot at him and they all laughed again.

A few minutes later the train was moving slowly out and Jane stood waving and grinning, while Irene admonished John out of the carriage window as he blew extravagant kisses on both hands towards Jane. She had to stop waving because she was laughing so much. When she could make out neither of them any more she turned away and hurried up the platform, still smiling to herself. She felt ridiculously happy. Her feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground. She gave up her platform ticket with such a look of elation that

the ticket collector gave her a startled look and then smiled to himself.

Jane went on. To-morrow she would be in the Cutting Rooms. She would tell them all about Irene's departure with John. Then soon, she would know what she was going to do . . . and there was the pre-view. Life was full of expectation.

At 8.20 p.m., exactly five weeks later, Jane drove up with her father, her mother and Mary to the West End theatre where the pre-view of 'Musical Madness' was to be shown.

They were all in evening dress and very excited. Her father, in dinner jacket, his hair oiled but, as usual, sticking upright, his eyes rounder and brighter than usual, her mother in a brown lace frock dug up from ten years before with a spray of fresh flowers on her shoulder and a new 'perm', Mary wildly ecstatic in blue net—her first full-length frock, her bright hair in shining curls with a blue band round her head and a new evening bag clutched in one hand; finally Jane, very superior and sophisticated in her black taffeta skirt and a new white velvet 'mess jacket' with huge sleeves and a white flower in her dark hair.

The taxi pulled up with a jerk and an interested crowd eddied from the last vehicle towards them. Jane got out first and various remarks floated up from the milling people.

"That's one of 'em—bettcher."

"Pat Kirkwood, ain't it?"

"Nope—it's . . . look at that kid—ain't that Sally Ann Howes?"

Mary nudged Jane so hard that she nearly fell over. They passed through the gaping people while Mr. Weldon paid the taxi.

"Did you hear," whispered Mary, thrilled. "They thought I was——"

"Yes, I heard."

Jane was looking round the vestibule timidly, trying to

find a familiar face. There was a blinding flash and Mary gasped "Oh!" and pulled her arm.

"They've taken a flashlight photograph of us!" hissed Mary excitedly.

"Don't be silly. There, behind you—that's Lilian Dune, the star of the film. They were taking her."

"We might be in the picture," said Mary hopefully.

Mr. and Mrs. Weldon joined them and they all stood in a group, Jane cautiously pointing out the people she knew. There was Mr. MacPherson, then Jim—some of the artistes and—and—

"Irene!" cried Jane delightedly, and pushed her way through the crowd to her.

She was with John and looked radiant.

"We've come to see your picture, Jane. Are the family here?"

"Yes. Come over."

Jane dragged her over and introduced her father, whom Irene had never met. Mary gazed at John, round-eyed. She had heard so much about him that he had become a real hero to her, especially since he had taken those photographs of Jane.

"So this is Mary," he said. "How old are you, Mary?"

"Thirteen—nearly fourteen."

"And are you still going to be a film actress?"

"I—I'm not so sure now. Jane said the test was awful. But I might go on the stage."

"Nonsense," said her mother firmly.

"Not nonsense at all," interposed her father. "She's a very good little actress."

"Unlike her sister," said Jane, pulling a face.

Irene took her arm. "Never mind, Jane. You're a good Continuity girl. I hear great things of 'Musical Madness'."

"Thank you," said Jane, "and I've got news, Irene. I'm staying on with the new company."

Irene's face lit up. "You are? John, did you hear that?"

"I did." He held out his hand, gripped and squeezed Jane's. "Good luck, Janc. I hope the salary is large?"

"Better than I could ever have dreamed of as a stenographer."

"That's it." He turned to her father. "It's a good day for British films, Mr. Weldon."

Her father's eyebrows shot up. "Indeed?"

"They've signed up your daughter."

He laughed delightedly. "Hear, hear!"

Irene turned away with Jane. "Time we went in, I think."

They moved in slowly with the crowd. Mr. MacPherson saw Irene and waved, then included Jane and her family in the gesture. It was warm, friendly and exciting.

They separated to go to their seats, promising to meet in the interval. Jane sat between Mary, who hung on to her arm, and her father, whose arm she held on to. Mrs. Weldon sat on his other side.

"Don't forget to watch for my name," whispered Jane to her father.

The lights went gradually dim. The orchestra music ceased and the music of the film faded in. A hush fell.

The title flashed on the screen. It was followed by the names of the Producer and Director. Jane tugged at her father's arm and jerked Mary's hand resting on her other arm.

"Now," she whispered.

On to the screen flashed the credits of the Unit. Jane drew in a deep breath and made herself glance all through the names. At the bottom were the words she had waited for over the past year, the words which gave her the key to her future, the words that meant she could stay in that life that had come to mean so much to her, where she was both herself and also part of the Unit . . . the Unit who, with its teamwork, its comradeship and its criticism was the basis

on which entertainments like this were built, entertainments whose laughter and wisdom were a force in the shaping of Life itself.

She read with a sense of quiet pleasure and achievement :

“ Continuity . . . Jane Weldon.”

